

Environmental spy



BSA

Copyright 1992

THE SPACE CLUB—New! Exciting! See Page 88

# AMAZING

ANC

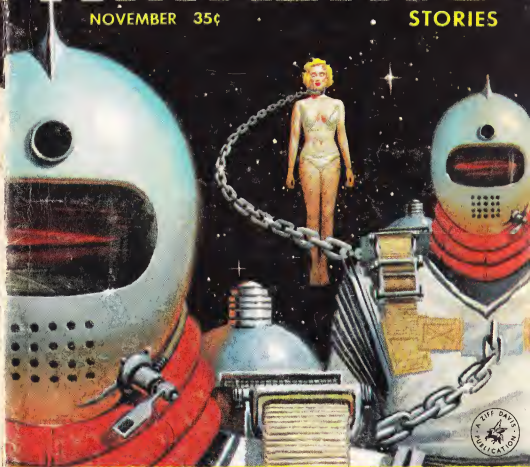
NOVEMBER 35¢

STORIES

EXCITING SCIENCE FICTION

AMAZING STORIES

NOVEMBER 1956 VOL. 30 NO. 11



THE MONSTER DIED AT DAWN By Clyde Mitchell

# 1957 PHOTOGRAPHY ANNUAL

A selection of the world's greatest photographs by the editors of Popular Photography

PHOTOGRAPHY ANNUAL 1957 EDITION

**NOW  
ON  
SALE  
EVERYWHERE!**



AMAZING STORIES, Vol. 30, No. 11, November 1956, is published monthly by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, William B. Ziff, Chairman of the Board (1946-1953), at 64 E. Lake St., Chicago 1, Illinois. Entered as second-class matter at Post Office at Chicago, Ill. Subscription rates: U. S. and possessions and Canada \$4.00 for 12 issues; Pan American Union Countries \$4.50; all other foreign countries \$5.00.

*You're invited  
to a  
Launching!*



## SPECIAL OFFER TO READERS OF AMAZING

# 5 months of POPULAR BOATING only \$1.00

(a \$2.40 single copy value!)

This is your special invitation to "sign on" as a Charter Subscriber to POPULAR BOATING—the new Ziff-Davis monthly for everyone who enjoys life on the water.

Beginners and "old salts" . . . inboard, outboard and sailing enthusiasts and their families—all are finding POPULAR BOATING the most enjoyable magazine in the boating world. Copies of the first big issue, on sale only a few days, have become hard to find because of their tremendous demand.

POPULAR BOATING, the first new major boating magazine in more than a generation—brings a completely fresh approach to the entire world of boats—from dinghy to power cruiser.

Published by the same company that has made AMAZING STORIES tops in its field, POPULAR BOATING features money-saving how-to articles that point the way to more fun, greater safety afloat . . . new construction ideas . . . information on repairing, improving, fitting out your boat . . . monthly classes on seamanship and boat handling by expert boatmen . . . exciting boating yarns that will transport you to every corner of the world where there's fun and adventure on the water . . . regular features on new products, junior activities, maintenance, fishing, free aids to better boating, and much more!

Here are just a few of the exciting articles in POPULAR BOATING's first issue:

- Breaking Through the "Water Barrier"
- Should Your First Boat Be Power or Sail?
- Outboards Unlimited
- Guy Lombardo's Greatest Boating Moments
- Ann Davison's Next Boating Venture

This first issue is already a complete sellout at many newsstands. For POPULAR BOATING offers readers far more than any other publication in the field . . . yet costs less. At regular rates, POPULAR BOATING sells for 35¢ on newsstands (Special Show Number: \$1.00) and \$4.00 a year by subscription.

However, as a regular AMAZING STORIES reader, you can climb aboard POPULAR BOATING for a trial cruise at a not-to-be-repeated introductory

rate—5 months for only \$1.00. You get the big \$1.00 January Boat Show Issue at no extra cost, too! All told, by taking advantage of this offer you save a whopping 58% over established rates.

And if you act now, your name will be entered on our list of Charter Subscribers. You'll be sent a special Charter Subscription Certificate. But most important—you'll be 100% sure of getting your copy of the very first issue of POPULAR BOATING, Volume 1, Number 1, sold out at many newsstands, is a "collector's item" in many homes.

But we have put aside a small supply for Charter Subscribers—and will start your subscription with the first copy as long as our supply lasts.

So use the coupon below to subscribe now. If you want us to begin your subscription with the very first issue—already on sale—check the special box. See how much boating enjoyment a dollar buys you in new, exciting POPULAR BOATING!

**Welcome aboard as a  
Charter Subscriber!  
Fill out and  
mail this coupon TODAY!**

### POPULAR BOATING

366 Madison Ave., New York 17, N.Y.  
CHARTER SUBSCRIPTION ORDER FORM

Please enter my Charter Subscription to POPULAR BOATING—at the special rate of five months for only \$1.00. My dollar is enclosed.

Name

Address

City  Zone  State

☐ Please start my subscription with Volume 1, Number 1, if possible.

☐ I've bought the first issue at a newsstand. Begin my subscription with the second (November) issue. A-11-6



**A NEW MAGAZINE BY THE PUBLISHERS OF AMAZING STORIES**

# AMAZING

STORIES

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY  
William B. Ziff (1898-1953) Founder  
Editorial and Executive Offices  
366 Madison Avenue  
New York 17, New York

President  
B. G. DAVIS

Vice Presidents —  
H. J. MORGANROTH  
MICHAEL H. FROELICH  
MICHAEL MICHAELSON

Secretary-Treasurer  
G. E. CARNEY

Art Director  
ALBERT GRUEN



NOVEMBER 1956

Volume 30 Number 11

## CONTENTS

<b>THE MONSTER DIED AT DAWN</b> By Clyde Mitchell.....	6
<b>PUZZLE IN YELLOW</b> By Randall Garrett.....	45
<b>CONCERTO FOR A PINK ELEPHANT</b> By B. B. Livingston.....	50
<b>SERVICE ELEVATOR</b> By Sam Merwin, Jr. ....	64
<b>THE IDIOT</b> By Paul V. Dallas.....	86
<b>THE RIVALS</b> By Robert Silverberg.....	92
<b>SLEEP IT OFF</b> By Henry Slesor.....	104
<b>THE NURSERY COMMANDOS</b> By Adam Chase.....	116

## DEPARTMENTS

<b>THE OBSERVATORY</b> By The Editor.....	5
<b>THE REVOLVING FAN</b> By Roger De Soto.....	83
<b>THE SPACE CLUB</b> .....	83
<b>... OR SO YOU SAY</b> By The Readers.....	126



Cover: EDWARD VALIGURSKY

Editor

PAUL W. FAIRMAN

Assistant Editor  
CELE GOLDSMITH

Art Editor  
HERBERT ROGOFF





BY THE EDITOR

## EDITORIAL ODDS AND ENDS—

• We attended the big science-fiction convention over the week-end here in New York at the Biltmore. Our first. Very interesting. Noted following highlights: Bob Silverberg, one of our writers, getting thrown out of the snooty cocktail lounge for not wearing a necktie . . . Jim Quinn of *IF*, debonair as usual, looking over exhibits on the way to the bar . . . The gracious wife of John W. Campbell, Jr., testing her IQ on *Amazing Stories* Amazivac. Sacrilege! . . . Ted Sturgeon looking self-conscious and embarrassed while Jean Shepherd plugged "I, Libertine" from the platform . . . Arthur C. Clarke, exhausted guest of honor, trying to stay awake long enough to reach the elevator . . . Leo Margulies, king of the fiction editors, circulating with Sam Merwin in tow . . . Cele Goldsmith, Z-D Fiction Group's new assistant editor, asking in pop-eyed wonder: "Are they for real?" . . . Randall Garrett trying to trip Bill Hamling while latter was toting trayful of cocktails. Good way to acquire *Imagination* rejection slips . . . The Science Fiction Queen (name escapes us at the moment) trying to don space helmet for the photogs without mussing hairdo . . . Insomniac fans prowling pre-dawn corridors asking each other: "Where'd everybody go?" . . . Charles DeVet getting three kings clobbered by three aces in late hand of a die-hard poker game . . . Big-time TV comedian, unnoticed, watching masquerade ball from the balcony . . . pre-teen fan counting pennies in lobby, sadly passing up candy counter . . . Fans avoiding the banquet in droves, seven-fifty per plate being too rough on the pocketbook . . . All in all, a good convention.—P.W.F.

# The Monster Died at Dawn



The brutal fists smashed sickeningly



against helpless flesh and bone.



# THE MONSTER DIED AT DAWN

By CLYDE MITCHELL

*They convicted him of the worst crime known in space; they put upon him the screaming mark of ridicule and contempt such as no man should be forced to bear. Then they drove him out into the spotlight where others had lost their minds and died of shame. But was he guilty of the crime they pinned on him? And if not, could he prove his innocence?*

SIX men faced him. Frozen within the hard lines of their military uniforms, they sat like graven images, their hands clasped rigidly, their eyes unblinking. Tony Flint turned his gaze from their arctic faces and looked towards the stars, scattered around the great inverted bowl which enclosed the central installation at Asteroid Base 41Y. But the stars were not friendly. They glittered like ten thousand eyes of merciless justice.

"Captain Anthony Flint," the court clerk said. "Please rise."

He rose from the chair, stiffening to attention.

General Bradford French spoke.

"I wish to speak to you about your decision." He frowned, and the carved lines about his mouth were deeply shadowed. "Your refusal to accept defense counsel will not influence this general court-martial one way or another. But for your own pro-

tection, I urge you to reconsider."

Tony stood silent. He was a tall man, almost too thin by space medical standards. His ash-blond hair was cut close to his head. He smiled easily; but he had not smiled in some time.

"Very well," French sighed. "But let me warn you, Captain. Silence is not a defense." He shrugged, and once more his square face grew gray with cold impartiality.

Then the clerk put Tony's shame into words.

"It is charged that on the day of September 5th, 2158, Earth reckoning, at approximately 2800 hours, that Captain Anthony Flint, commander of Expeditionary Space Fleet 304, did knowingly and willfully refuse to respond to an SOS from Expeditionary Space Fleet vessel *Columbine* enroute to Asteroid Base 41Y after its initial landing on the planet Junus in the Motherstar system, resulting in the subsequent explosion and total demolition of that vessel with all hands aboard . . ."

Tony Flint bowed his head.

"It is charged that Captain Anthony Flint's conduct in this emergency was in direct conflict with the sacred rules

and regulations of the Space Command, and in direct contradiction to its equally sacred traditions of honor and courage . . ."

The emotionally - worded charge brought the blood to Tony's head. He opened his mouth at the word "courage" but closed it again before the court's accusations were concluded.

Then he was seated, and they were calling witnesses.

"Lt. Martin J. Fingal!"

Tony's lips curled as he watched Fingerwave make his way to the witness chair, his back ramrod-straight, his curly black hair neatly greased and combed.

"State your rank, serial number, and duties."

"First Lieutenant," Fingerwave drawled, shifting in the chair and crossing his legs. "Serial number 9820045. Chief Navigator aboard ES304 flagship, *Guardian*; secondary duty, Entertainment Officer."

The General leaned forward. "You were aboard the *Guardian* at the time of the radio message from the *Columbine*?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were you present when the message was received?"

"No, sir. I was engaged in

plotting the *Guardian's* course through the Magellan cluster. Merely as an exercise, naturally. We weren't scheduled for that tour until April."

Tony made a noise in his throat. *Good old Fingerwave*, he thought. *A doublecross to the end*. At the time of the message from the *Columbine*. Lt. Fingal had been sprawled across his bunk, teaching a young shavetail the mysteries of draw poker.

"So you didn't actually hear the message?"

"No, sir. As I understand it, Captain Flint was in the radio section with Sparks. It was Sparks who heard the SOS, and after he got kicked out—"

"Captain Flint!" The General's voice was a growl. "If you intend to be your own defense counsel, I urge you to act like one. This last statement is hearsay evidence. You must object at such lapses."

But Tony sat silent.

"Very well," French said gravely.

Fingerwave went on, "Anyway, after Sparks got kicked out of the radio cabin—"

"One moment." Colonel House, a gentle-faced man with white hair held up his hand. "Am I to understand that your radio operator left

his post—while a message was delivered?"

"That's right, sir."

"I think," French said sourly, "that we will allow the radio man to tell us that part of the story. Lt. Fingal may inform us of the events he witnessed directly."

"Yes, sir! As I was saying, Sparks came by and told us about the captain ordering him out of the cabin, so naturally we were a little curious. Some of us—Lt. Chase, Custis, Andrews, and myself—went up forward to see what we could learn. We saw Captain Flint coming out of the radio section, looking like a ghost—"

"Be specific," House murmured.

"He looked like walking death, sir. Lt. Chase asked him what was wrong, and he muttered something about the *Columbine* . . ."

"You sure he mentioned the *Columbine* by name?"

"Positive, sir. Then he sort of staggered off—like a drunk."

"Is this another charge?" House asked mildly.

"Oh, no, sir. All I meant was the captain was very shaky." Fingerwave ran a hand through the ripples of hair on his head. "You can

check that with the others, sir."

"And what happened after that?"

"Well, nothing very much. Sparks went back to his cabin, until we got that message from the base to report in. It was only then that we heard about the *Columbine* blowing up."

They offered Tony the opportunity for cross-examination. He refused it.

"Call the next witness," General French said.

"Sergeant Willis Thurman!"

"Rank, serial number, and duties, Sergeant."

He was a small, wiry man, with sensitive hands and an uncontrollable adam's apple.

"Sergeant," he gulped. 658023, Radio operator on board the *Guardian*, sir. Secondary duty, er, Sanitary Engineer."

"Tell us about the incident in the cabin during receipt of the message from the *Columbine*."

"Yes, sir. Well, it was this way, sir. About 2800, I was sitting in the radio section. There was nothing on the board, so I was sort of—well, I wasn't doing much, sir. Then Captain Flint came in, just to pick up the Earth-

cables; only there weren't any. We got to talking a little about things; I mean, Captain Flint was always easy with the men, sir—"

General French grumbled something.

"Anyway," Thurman said, swallowing hard, "we were talking awhile when this SOS came in. I jumped on it right away, sir, and since the captain was there, I handed him the headphones. It was only courtesy, you see—"

"You're certain it was an SOS?"

"Oh, yes, sir. No doubt of that. After a while, we picked up the voice of Captain Savannah on the *Columbine*—"

"You spoke to the captain himself?"

"It was him all right. Only it was kind of faint, if you know what I mean. I figured we had an electrical field between us or something."

"Did Captain Savannah state his position?"

"Yes, sir. It was 99, 60, 80, same as the position where the—the accident happened. We could hear that."

"Go on, Sergeant."

"Well, anyway, Captain Flint keeps yelling at him, saying 'Go on, Joe! Speak up!' You see, the captain—Captain Flint, that is—he

was quite a pal of Captain Savannah's, and—"

"Never mind that," French said curtly. "Just tell us what you heard, Sergeant."

"Well, I didn't hear too much after that." Thurman scratched his head. "Captain Savannah said something about 'terrible danger'—"

"This is important," Colonel House said. "Please repeat exactly what you heard."

"Well, I can't swear it was *exact*. I mean, the reception was pretty bad, sir. But it sounded like 'terrible danger.' And then the captain here—he told me to leave."

For the dreadful space of ten seconds, while the asteroid swung slowly in its tiny orbit, a silence fell over the courtroom.

The sergeant looked at the floor. "That's what happened, sir. Captain Flint turns to me and says: 'Get out, Sparks. Do you hear me? Get out of here!'"

"Are you quoting verbatim?"

"Sir?"

"Is that exactly what Captain Flint said?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I remember that, all right. So I figured I had to follow orders, sir. I left the cabin."

Colonel House sighed. "And when you returned, Sergeant?"

No more messages from the *Columbine*?"

"Not a one, sir. Next message came from here, telling us about the accident and ordering us down. I brought it to Captain Flint myself."

"What was his reaction when he saw the message?"

The sergeant paused.

"He cried, sir."

One by one, the crew of the flagship *Guardian* took the witness chair.

One by one, their words damned Tony Flint.

Some of them—the bored, brash group of officers who had elected Lt. Fingerwave their unofficial ringleader—looked boldly at him as they related their stories of the incident.

Others—the great majority of the *Guardian* officers and virtually all the men—would not look at him at all as their accounts were collated by the small humming steno machine in the corner of the courtroom.

The tones of their voices became leaden as the trial progressed. But at one point, a new note was struck.

First Lieutenant Charles Custis was on the stand: duties, Pilot Second Class and Historical Officer.

"Lt. Custis, you say you

knew nothing of the incident until it was related to you by Lt. Fingal?"

"Yes, sir. And I didn't believe it, sir." He thrust his young chin forward. "I knew the captain wouldn't do such a thing. If there was a chance to save the *Columbine*, he would have ordered us to the site."

"I see," French said. "But you received no such order?"

"No, sir. But afterward, I got to thinking that something must have been really wrong to—well, you know what I mean, sir. So I had a thought. You see, we automatically tape off all messages received—"

"Of course!" Colonel House exploded. "What idiots we are! Why wasn't that tape submitted in evidence?"

"Well, sir—I went to Sparks to ask him for the tape. But as it turned out, the tape was missing."

"What? How is that possible?"

"I don't know, sir. But it was gone, all right." He squirmed miserably.

"Why would anyone steal such a thing?" General French asked.

"I don't know," Lt. Custis said.

The eyes of the court turned to Tony again.

He sat silent.

Overhead, the stars were cruel.

Seven hours later, the court reconvened.

"Captain Anthony Flint," the court clerk said. "Please rise."

Tony got up, to face the six frozen men at the long table.

"This is our verdict," General French said, almost casually. "By the process of general court-martial, Space Command Fleet, Asteroid Base 41Y, Captain Anthony Flint is found guilty on all charges."

He cleared his throat.

"As you know, there is no right of appeal in a Space Command court except in the most unusual cases. Therefore, the following sentence will be carried out with the utmost despatch. Captain Anthony Flint is hereby divested of all rank and authority as a Space Command officer, and shall be immediately returned to Earth in civilian status, with none of the privileges of military retirement."

He looked up from the paper in his hand.

"And, since the Command regards the nature of this offense as being the gravest contradiction of our ideals,

Captain Anthony Flint is to be subjected to immediate treatment with Chromisthorne, as punishment for his cowardice, and as a mark of the disgrace and contempt which his defection deserves."

General French stood up.

"This court-martial is adjourned."

Only a handful of officers and men attended the ceremony that ended Tony Flint's military career.

But the Chromisthorne treatment was private.

Major Drake, the Chief Medical Officer on 41Y, directed the internes who placed Tony on the flat top of the examining table. Straps were secured around his neck, waist, and legs, but unnecessarily; Tony wasn't resisting.

Carefully, Drake filled the hypodermic with the brilliant chemical.

He plunged the point painlessly into Tony's upper arm.

"It will be an hour or so before the dye takes effect," he told him matter-of-factly. "And in case you're doubtful about its permanency, you can forget it. Chromisthorne becomes as much a part of your body as your blood stream. There is an antidote, but its obtainment is slightly

more difficult than stealing the Pentagon."

"Thanks," Tony said dryly, looking at his arm in unhealthy fascination.

"Well! So you *can* talk, Captain. After the trial, I was beginning to wonder."

"I can talk," Tony said. "But right now—I don't think it would do much good."

They released him from the straps, and he sat up and dressed.

And an hour later, Tony Flint's skin—every inch of it—was a bright, screaming, horrible yellow.

The Skyway Towers rose eighty stories from the white-paved streets of Westchester in Greater New York County. It was an impressive sight. It ascended in great sheets of dull blue glass, and its turrets were blunt against the leaden skies. In one of the building's two thousand apartments Trina Savannah was sprawled full-length on a pneumatic sofa, staring dull-eyed at the romantic scenes on her television wall.

She was bored, and she was angry with her boredom.

Then the doorbell rang.

She was grateful for the rich, mellow sound, and went flying across the thick carpet towards the doorway.

But she gasped when she saw her visitor.

"Mrs. Savannah?" He swept off his rain-dampened hat, and the short, ash-blond hair stood up ludicrously from the bandage that covered his face from hairline to chin.

"Yes. I'm Mrs. Savannah."

Tony Flint's eyes, behind the cavities he had cut into the swathing, widened. He had known Joe Savannah as intimately as life in the Command would allow. But he had never realized that the "Trina" Joe had spoken of would be a woman as beautiful as this.

"I'd like to talk to you. Just for a little while. My name is Tony Flint; I was a friend of your husband."

"Oh." Her lovely, clear-planed face seemed to fall. She threw back her head, and the golden billows of hair tossed prettily. "Come in, Mr. Flint."

Seated in the deep restful embrace of the armchair, surrounded by muted tones of color, Tony found himself trembling.

"I was with the Space Command," he said at last. "I got to know your husband well. Since I was back on Earth—" He hesitated. "On leave—I thought I would stop

by and give you my sympathies."

"Sympathies?" She looked at him coldly through intense violet eyes. Then she tucked the white houserobe tightly around her knees. "Did you say your name was Flint?"

"Yes."

"Captain Flint?"

"That's right." Panic started in his chest. Had she heard of the trial?

"Joe used to write me about you," the woman said. "He was very fond of you. In fact, I was under the impression that it was an advance case of hero worship. My Joey was like that; an impulsive child . . ."

"He was a fine man," Tony said.

"I'm sure of it. Unfortunately, we were hardly married long enough for me to find out."

The figures on the television wall, a man and woman in a torrid embrace, were making cooing sounds. Angrily, Trina rose and turned off the mechanism. When she returned, she tucked one leg beneath her, revealing a view of its elongated beauty.

"And what's *your* problem, Captain Flint? I see you've had an accident."

"You mean the bandage? I—I got rather a bad space



burn. But it's not serious now."

"Yes, I've heard of it. As a matter of fact, I've seen one or two cases of the same thing. Men from the Space Command, wearing bandages. But usually . . ." She lit a long cigarette, and blew a column of smoke towards him. "Usually, they decide that the bandages will make life more miserable than—the color of their skin."

Tony's shoulders sagged. Then she *did* know.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't know the story had reached you."

"The War Department was most explicit. You'd be amazed at the lengthy report I received. Remarkably efficient bunch."

Tony stood up. "Then I'll be going—"

"Going where?" Her words rang hard, even in the sound-cushioned room. "Back to Dark Street? To the alleys? What does a man like you *do*, Captain?"

"I don't know. I've only been on Earth a few days. The first thing I did was to arrange for these bandages. That took quite a while. Then I took a room at a boarding house on Dark Street and Champman Ave-

nue. I—I haven't thought about the future."

"You won't like it," Trina Savannah said. Then she laughed. "You won't like the future at all, Captain Flint. You're not the first branded one to come back from space. Ask the others! No leper in the Middle Ages ever had it worse."

He started for the door.

"Wait!" The girl came towards him, her hand on his sleeve. "I want to ask you a favor."

"Anything I can do—"

"Anything?" She looked at him coolly. "Will you take the bandages off? For me?"

"Take them off? But why?"

"Please! I've never seen this thing close up. I'd like to. Now."

He stared at her for a while.

"All right," he shrugged. He began unwinding the layers of cloth bound around his head.

She watched avidly, her lovely face distorted by an unholy curiosity. When the bandages were off, she stepped away from him.

"It—it's so *yellow*."

"Yes. It's not saffron; nothing oriental about it. It's really a remarkable chemical." He frowned. "May I go now?"

The laugh started deep in the girl's throat. It rumbled at the base of her neck, until the sound came gushing from her red mouth in spasms of hilarity. She threw back her head, and the golden rivulets of hair danced insanely behind her. She laughed until the tears spilled from her eyes, and she dropped weakly on the sofa.

"What the hell's so funny?" Tony raged. "What's the matter with you?"

"With me?" the girl choked. "Nothing the matter with me, dear Captain Flint. But look at yourself! Just look at yourself!" She reached behind her, and produced a delicately-molded hand mirror. She thrust it in front of him, and Tony turned his face aside.

"Look for yourself!" Trina Savannah shrieked. "You're yellow, Captain Flint! You're yellow!"

The storm that had been gathering in Tony Flint's body for over a month unleashed a thunderclap. His hand lashed out and knocked the mirror from the woman's hand. It struck the marble table near the sofa, and splintered into countless shards.

"Coward!" the girl shouted. "Coward! Coward! Coward! . . ."

All the way down the hall, even while the elevator descended to the lobby of the Skyway Towers, Tony Flint could hear Trina's wild challenge.

*"Coward Coward! Coward! Coward . . ."*

He was halfway up the steps of the boarding house on Dark Street before he realized that his bandages were still clutched in his hand. He stared at them, and then flung them into the littered street.

Mrs. McAdams, the landlady, looked at him curiously as he entered the narrow, redolent hallway.

"It's all right," he told her. "I'm Mr. Flint. The—the doctor took the bandages off today."

She squinted at him. "You still don't look right to me," she clucked maternally. "It's your skin—"

"I know. It's—a disease, you see. A space infection."

"Ah." The old woman pushed past him, and then stooped. "It's not catchin'?"

"Oh, no. Nothing like that."

He turned and hurried up the stairs to his room.

It was small, and it was bare, and yet it was crowded with the ghosts of lonely, desolate men who had fallen

gratefully on its rusty-sprung bed, and stared hopelessly at its cracked ceiling. Tony's one suitcase, a blocky affair of beautiful leather, sat in the corner, still unpacked.

He went to the suitcase now, and lifted it onto the mattress. The springs protested.

He unpacked the uniform, stripped of its emblems and insignias, and tossed it over the bedrail.

Then he removed his other clothing, and threw them haphazardly into the squatty bureau between the windows that faced Dark Street.

At the bottom of the suitcase, his hand struck a hard object. He lifted it out, and tossed it in his hand.

It was a reel of recording tape, marked: PROPERTY OF THE SPACE COMMAND, ES304.

Someone rapped on the door.

"Who's there?" He put the tape back in the suitcase and snapped the locks shut.

"It's me, Mrs. McAdams."

He opened the door a crack, and saw the old woman fumbling with her apron.

"I forgot to tell you, Mr. Flint. A man came by here this afternoon, while you was out. I thought it was you, at

first, on account of his bandages and all—"

"What?"

"Anyway, it was a shorter man, but I thought it was funny, him having bandages on his face. But the thing is, he left this here envelope for you."

Tony took it from her hand. "Thank you."

"Oh, you're welcome, Mr. Flint. Only like I say, I hope this sickness isn't catchin'. I mean, it's hard enough gettin' decent boarders, without—"

"Thank you, Mrs. McAdams." He pushed the door shut.

Tony took the envelope to the bed and snapped on the meager bulb of the bedlamp.

The envelope was blank.

He tore it open, and took out a stiff yellow card.

His name was written across the top in ink: *Anthony Flint*. The rest was typewritten.

*You are cordially invited to attend a meeting of the Cowards' Club, to be held tonight, October 24th, at 8:30 p.m., 940 Dark Street, Apt. 5B. Membership will be discussed.*

The invitation was signed: *William Clapper, President.*

Tony read the strange words several times over in the hooded light by the bed. His first thought was that the message was the forerunner of some savage joke. But then his bitter spirit told him that company—even ill-intentioned company — would be welcome.

He got up from the bed, rubbing his cheek. The bristle was heavy, but the thought of shaving turned his stomach. He went to the bathroom, and looked at himself in the mirror for the first time. He didn't like what he saw, but the blond stubble on his cheeks didn't improve his terrible pallor.

He turned on the faucet, and then shaved.

Dark Street extended a mile behind the row of gleaming apartment buildings and hotels on Westchester Boulevard, a black ribbon of sagging houses and dirty streets. "Bars, boarding, and bawdy houses," the uniformed guides in the aerobuses would say with a chuckle, and then quickly turn the tourists' attention to the magnificence of Skyway Towers.

Tony shuffled along the poorly-lit street, peering at the faded numerals above

the doorways, looking for 940.

He found it at last, above the curlicued facade of a semi-respectable building of some twelve stories.

There was a sign on the elevator, handwritten and to the point:

### NOT WORKING— USE THE STAIRS

He shrugged, and went up the wooden flights to the fifth floor. He paused at the doorway and knocked cautiously. A minute passed before a muffled voice asked:

"Who is it?"

"Tony Flint," he said.

A chain rattled, and then the door was opened. The man who was framed within, his features engraved in the glare of the naked bulb in the foyer, was short. He had an open, boyish face, and his eyes were alight with puppy friendliness.

But his skin was a bright yellow.

"Come in, Cap," he said cheerfully. "I'm Goop Sawyer. We hoped you'd drop in."

"Yes," Tony said uncertainly.

They were gathered in the living room, seated on the edge of their chairs. The ash tray on the long table before

them was piled high, and empty beer glasses surrounded it. They rose as Tony Flint walked into the room, moving soundlessly, as if they had learned to live by silence. There were four of them.

"They call me Ranger," the tallest man said. He was raw-boned and sandy-haired. His grip was firm, and his skin was bright yellow.

"I'm Johnny Cook," the youngest man said. He was stocky, and downy-cheeked. He looked at the floor, and didn't extend his hand. His skin was yellow.

"I'm Bill Clapper," the next man said. He was the oldest of the group, a man close to fifty. His grizzled white hair was in need of trimming. His skin was yellow, too.

"And you met me," Goop Sawyer grinned. "Sit down and relax. We're all in the same boat."

They chuckled, with only a whisper of humor.

The older man handed a beer glass over.

"Look, Captain," he said. "I don't know what thoughts are running through your head right now. All of us, we've been back on Earth for two, three years and more. We had time to get over the big shock. You—well, you

haven't had any time at all to get used to—this." He indicated his cheek with a brush of his fingers.

"I don't get it," Tony said. "Were you all in the Command?"

"All of us," the man called Ranger said. "We all got the same treatment; this Chromisthome stuff. And all for the same reason. Cowardice."

Tony winced.

"We're not afraid of the word," the older man said. "We were at first, and that's what made things worse. It was only when we admitted the fact to ourselves that we could go on living. For one reason or another, Captain Flint—we were all cowards."

He leaned back and crossed his legs.

"I guess you'd call me the founder of the Cowards' Club. I was on Callisto when—when it happened to me. I wasn't the first yellowskin they tossed out of space, but I didn't meet another for a couple of years. That's when I met Ranger here, in a Dark Street bar. We began sharing each other's problems. Then we hooked up with Johnny and Goop, and decided to make our friendship official. So we formed the Cowards' Club. When we heard your

story, we decided to ask you to join." He paused, watching Tony's face. "What do you say, Captain?"

"I don't know." Tony's voice was pained. "This is all new to me. I've already gotten the idea that making friends isn't going to be easy."

"You betcha," Goop said.

"I'll tell you what," Ranger said slowly, and now Tony recognized the western accent. "Why don't we tell you *why* we formed the club?"

"All right."

Bill Clapper said: "I'll sum it up in a paragraph, Captain. We want to be free of the yellow stain. We want to walk the streets without holding our heads down. We even want to go back to Space someday. Alone, as individuals, there's not much we could do." His voice grew intense. "But together—working together—maybe we'd find the answer. Maybe we'd get the one chance we need to be—" He stopped, and grinned ruefully. "I'll get off the soap box," he said. "But that's the general idea."

Tony looked at their yellow faces. The young man called Johnny said:

"Maybe we oughta tell our stories."

The tall westerner put down his glass.

"I was with the Command during the first landing on Ganymede. Pilot, First Class. There wasn't any animal life, but there was a peculiar red vegetation, great bursts of it, big as oaks. My secondary duty was Botanist; me and the geologist set out to pick us a sample of the stuff." The muscles in his lean face began to jerk. "The red plant got him. It wasn't carnivorous—just a killer. I started to pull him out, but when the stuff touched me I screamed like a kid. I ran away and left him there." He closed his eyes. "The captain and some of the others saw the whole thing through field glasses. They got there too late to save the geologist, but they froze the plant with the blast of an oxygen gun. I was back in the ship by this time, shiverin' like a calf. You can guess the rest."

The stout young man pursed his lips.

"I was an engineer. It happened to me on my first flight out. I was plenty scared, believe me. Then we got hit with a meteor shower and the ship was damaged. They sent us out to make repairs on the skin. It was my first time in space," he said again.

"Go on, Johnny," the older man coaxed.

"I don't know what happened to me. But floating out there, I suddenly got the idea that a pellet had punctured my oxygen tank. I got panicky; I thought I couldn't breathe. I started to fight to get back inside the ship. One of the other engineers tried to stop me, and I hit him with a tool. They pulled us apart, but the engineer was in a bad way. He had to be sent back to Earth on the hospital ship. I was sent back, too. Like this. . . ."

Goop Sawyer said:

"I was a Weapons man on the *Conqueror*, based on Mars. We were transferring explosives between Mars and Deimos when one of the crates got loose in the hold. I was the only one who saw it happen, and I got scared. Instead of going after it, I opened the airlock and let the crate float out into space. Something must have triggered it out there. There was a blast that knocked out half our tail rockets. We managed to make it back to Deimos, but three crewmen were killed by the concussion."

The oldest man, Bill Clapper, said:

"I got it on Callisto, during

the first landing. We were setting up the base, and my nerves were shot. Suddenly, the whole world went black—a trick that crazy moon has. I thought it was my eyes; thought I had lost my sight. I went off my head, began to imagine that there were creatures after me. I pulled out my gun and started shooting at the first noise. I wound up killing two of the landing party; both were friends."

Their stories ended, the members of the Cowards' Club grew silent.

Then Bill Clapper said:

"What do you say, Captain? Will you join?"

"Yes," Tony answered. "I'll join. But there's only one thing I have to tell you. I'm sorry for everything that happened to you out there. I won't attempt to judge what you did."

"But as for myself—I'm innocent."

They stared at him.

"Knowing that," Tony said, "do you still want me?"

"Sure," Ranger drawled. "If you want us."

Tony Flint left 940 Dark Street with a lighter heart. When he passed a brightly-lighted bar called *Mitch's*, he decided that a whiskey would end the evening properly.

He pushed open the door, and sat in the darkest corner of the bar.

"Scotch on the rocks," he told the bartender.

The heavy-set man peered at him, and then sneered.

"Sure, chief." He walked to the other end and took a bottle from the shelf, leaning over to whisper something to the two men hulking over their drinks on the far side. When he came back, he poured the drink with an insolent gesture, and picked up Tony's money in his fingertips.

Tony gulped the whiskey quickly.

When he stepped outside, the hot fluid seemed to have left a smoldering burn on his insides. He walked slowly across the street, kicking at the refuse in the gutter.

He was almost at the stairs of his boarding house before he realized that he was being followed.

"Hey, pal!"

Tony turned. There were two of them, their shoulders wide and bunched with muscles.

"Yes?"

"Got a match, pal?"

He dug into his trousers and came out with a box. The first man snatched it from his hand, while the second man gripped the cloth of his

sleeve. Then the match was struck, and the flame held to Tony's face.

"I thought so!" the first man said. "Yellowskin!" The second man spun Tony's arm around his back. Before he had time to retaliate, the man with the match had stubbed out the fire on his cheekbone. He howled with pain and rage, and then groaned as a fist drove into his midsection. He doubled over, and a hard hand descended on the back of his neck.

"Dirty yellowbelly!" one of them shouted.

He tried to get up, and saw a thick-soled shoe descending towards his head. He reached out a hand and caught the impact painfully on his palm. Then a knee was thudding against his temple, sending him sprawling into the filthy street.

"Kill the coward!"

"Kill the dirty yellow-skin!"

He waited for the final blows to fall, but something stopped them.

A lowslung dome-car had pulled up beside the curb, its wheels almost touching him. And a woman's voice was saying:

"That's enough! Let him alone!"



"Hey! What's the big idea?"

"*This* is the big idea." Tony looked up blearily, and saw the revolver in the woman's hand.

"Okay, lady. Don't get so upset. He's only a rotten little—"

"*Get out of here!*"

Then he was being helped inside the car.

"You see what I mean about the future?" the woman said. It was Trina Savannah.

They sat well apart from each other in the Skyway Tower living room, and the lights were mercifully dim. Even in the semi-darkness, Tony could perceive that the woman's striking features had softened since that afternoon, and her violet eyes held pity.

"I'm sorry for what I said today," she told him. "I wasn't feeling very sociable. I didn't mean to pass judgment on you, even though the court-martial did."

"Thanks."

"I was coming to see you tonight. To apologize. I thought over what happened, and I remembered all the letters Joe used to write me about you. I felt it was unfair to condemn you so quickly."

Tony touched the bruise that was swelling black beneath his eye. "You couldn't have come at a better time. I think those thugs were out to kill me."

The woman lit a cigarette, and her voice was dreamy. "There's something I should tell you," she said. "About Joe and myself. You see, we were married less than two months when Joe took his assignment. He promised me that he would leave the Command when his hitch was done—I had no interest in being a space widow. But temptation got the better of him. He couldn't resist the crazy lure up there." She waved her hand towards the window.

"I'm sorry."

"No sorrier than I was. I told Joe that if he accepted the Junus assignment, we were through. But somehow, he didn't take me seriously. He expected me to wait, with a candle in the window. He was wrong. I filed suit for divorce a day after his ship left. In another few weeks, we would have been legally parted. But then—the accident happened."

Tony said nothing.

"But that doesn't mean I've lost interest, Captain Flint. More than anything—I want

to know why Joe died."

"I can't help you—"

"You were the last person to contact him. Surely you must have an idea?"

"No." His reply was sullen.

"Was it true, then? What they said?" She put the question easily, without rancor. "Was he in such dreadful danger that you didn't *dare* go to his aid?"

"Perhaps."

"I don't believe you, Captain. Joe wasn't the best judge of character in the world. Witness *me*. But he couldn't have been that wrong about his dear Captain Flint."

"I think I'd better leave now." Tony started to his feet, and his head throbbed.

"No. I won't let you, Captain. Not until you tell me what you know."

Tony Flint sat back with a sigh, and a sudden feeling of relief.

"All right. I guess I can keep the secret just so long. You may as well know why your husband's ship blew up. Then you can share the guilt with me. Maybe that's the best way—"

"What do you mean?"

"I have a reel of recording tape in my suitcase back at the boarding house. I stole it from the radio cabin of the

*Guardian*, right after the SOS came through from the *Columbine*. Do you have a tape-player?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll bring it over. You can hear Joe's last words for yourself. God knows—maybe you can figure out what happened to him."

Half an hour later, it was two in the morning, and Tony Flint and the widow of his best friend were kneeling before the speaker of the tape-player in Trina's living room.

"Listen carefully," Tony whispered. "The first thing you'll hear will be the SOS signal."

The beeps came forth, faintly, and the click of the receiving switch. Static electricity crackled for the space of thirty seconds, and then a far-off voice spoke.

"*Columbine* to *Guardian* . . . Captain Joe Savannah calling the *Guardian* . . ."

"We read you, *Columbine* . . . over . . ." It was the nasal voice of Sparks.

"Let me have that!" Tony's voice cracked like a whip.

"Position," Joe Savannah said. "99, 60, 80—"

"What's wrong, Joe?"

"That you, Tony?"

"Yes! What's the matter?"

"Great danger here . . ."

"Go on, Joe! Speak up!"

There was a silence, and then a strange, indeterminate sound. At first, it might have been the noises made by some animal. But then, to the man and woman crouched by the tape-player, it became clearly the sound of Joe Savannah in tears.

"Sparks! Get out of here!"

"Huh?"

"Get out, Sparks! Do you hear me! Get out of here!"

"Yes, sir!"

Another silence, and the clanging of a door.

"Joe! Get hold of yourself! What's happening aboard?"

"Have to do it, Tony. Can't think of any other way. Have to blow up the ship—"

"No, Joe! For God's sake, what's wrong?"

"Only thing I can think of. Sorry as hell. Had to jam the reactors . . . ought to blow in half an hour. Better clear out of the area, Tony. Going to be one hell of an impact—"

"Joe, you're crazy! You got fifty men aboard!"

"Have I?" The weak voice suddenly broke into a laugh.

"No other way, Tony—"

"Joe! Joe, I'm coming to help you!"

"Then you'll die, too! She's gonna blow, Tony! Keep your ship away! She's gonna—"

Silence.

"Joe!" Noises at the instrument board. "*Guardian to Columbine! Come in Columbine!*"

Silence.

Tony Flint removed the tape from the machine carefully, and brought it with him to the armchair. He sat down in great fatigue, and downed the drink that Trina had provided.

"So that was that," Tony said.

"I don't understand—"

"Your husband went berserk. Don't ask me why—space madness, maybe—call it anything you like. And I couldn't endanger the lives of the men aboard my ship by going to the site. If he had jammed the reactors, there was nothing we could do. Except die with him . . ."

"And then?"

"Then we received the message from the Asteroid Base. A cruiser had been side-swiped by the concussion, and had returned to find out what had caused the blow. They found the scraps. It was completely demolished."

Trina's face was in her hands.

"My poor Joey," she said.

A moment later, Tony Flint was by her side, comforting the woman, and being comforted in turn.

A short while after, their mouths were touching.

The stars swept by the viewplate, and the silver ship was falling into darkness. He found himself flung into the gaping black of the airlock and sent spinning round and round into the void. Then he saw that he wasn't alone. Along the hull of the ship marched a procession of spacemen, stepping ponderously in single file. One by one, they passed in review, and through every faceplate, a yellow skull grinned at him. He screamed at them, and their soundless voices replied . . . "Coward . . . coward . . ."

"It's morning," Trina said gently.

Her hand was soft on his shoulder. He sat up with a groan.

"I'm sorry," the girl said. "I didn't figure you'd sleep this late. I've already set breakfast on the table."

"S'okay." Tony swung his legs off the bed, and grinned shamefacedly. "It wasn't much of a dream, anyway . . ."

"Oh?" She slipped an arm around his shoulder. "Hating yourself in the morning?"

"No. How about yourself?"

"I'm doing all right."

He dressed quickly after a

shower in the woman's powderblue bathroom. He grimaced when he saw his yellow skin in the mirror, but gritted his teeth and shaved.

They ate the morning meal without speaking, until they heard the sound of the teleprinter chugging in the outer hallway. Trina got up and went to it, and soon returned with the sheets of newsprint in her hand. She glanced at them briefly before handing them to Tony. Her reaction to the headline was written swiftly on her face.

"What is it?" Tony said.

He read the report.

*TWO MORE SPACESHIPS  
DEMOLISHED IN JUNUS  
LANDINGS! LEXINGTON  
AND GUARDIAN LOST  
WITH ALL HANDS; SPACE  
COMMISSION PROMISES  
FULL INVESTIGATION OF  
TRAGEDY*

"No!" Tony said. Then his blurring eyes turned to the smaller print.

*November 25th, SP—Asteroid Base 41Y reports the total demolition of two more spaceships of ES304, including the flagship Guardian of that command. The explosions completely destroyed both ships with all hands aboard,*

*after attempted landings on the planet Junus in the Motherstar system. Only two months before, the spaceship Columbine was similarly destroyed after its return from the first landing on the still-uncharted world . . .*

"Junus!" Tony said, as if the word were a terrible oath.

"What does it mean, Tony?"

"It means they're dead! All of them! Chase, and Andrews, and Custis, and Fingerwave—all of them!" He put his head on the table.

"Tony . . ."

Wisely, she let him weep in silence.

When his emotions were reined, he talked slowly, with mounting anger.

"Junus is the key," he told her. "Joe made the first landing on the planet, and was on his way back to the base. Whatever happened to him, happened because of Junus. And now—two more ships destroyed on that crazy planet. There must be a connection, Trina—"

"The inhabitants," the girl said. "You said it's an Earth-type planet. They must be hostile."

"Then why did they let Joe get away?"

He paced the floor, thud-

ding his tightly-rolled fists against his thighs.

"They won't send another ship now. Not after this! Not until they've — investigated this thing to a turn. Maybe we'll never find out what happened."

"But what can you do?"

"There must be something! Even if it means—"

"Tony! What are you thinking?"

He walked to the window.

"Of space, Trina."

He waited for the fourth meeting of the Cowards' Club before he told his story.

Bill Clapper was sucking peacefully on an empty pipe while Tony talked. Ranger, the tall westerner, watched him with quivering jaw muscles. Johnny Cook flushed deeply at the tale, and Goop Sawyer showed his excitement plainly.

"These explosions are cut from the same cloth," he said. "There's a connection between every one of these losses. I'm certain of it!"

"I'm not sure I get the point," Bill Clapper said.

"Maybe this will help," Tony said grimly.

He picked up the stolen tape-recording from the radio cabin of the flagship *Guardian*.

The Cowards' Club listened in silence.

When he switched the machine off, Tony said:

"So now you know my story, too. I couldn't tell the Command about Joe Savannah. It was worse than any disgrace I would have to face." He scowled at them. "I know it sounds like heroics. But I don't feel so heroic now. Now all I want to do is find out what killed my friends."

The older man sighed. "We understand that, Tony. But I don't see how we can help."

"But I do. I can see it plainly." He looked around the room, pausing at each yellow face. "Ranger, you're a pilot and so am I. I think we'd make a pretty good team on a ship. Don't you?"

The westerner looked baffled. "Why, I guess."

"And you, Johnny. You've only made one flight into space, but I know you're itching for another. I think you'd be a valuable man to have in the engineering department."

The stocky youth flushed.

"And you, Goop. You can handle any weapon and any radio ever built. That right?"

"You betcha!"

"And as for yourself, Bill. You were one hell of a navigator before that bad break

on Callisto. Do you still feel you could do a job?"

"What are you getting at, Tony? A flying trip to Junus?"

"Exactly."

Ranger whistled.

"Sure, I know it's crazy," Tony Flint said. "But you can bet that the Space Command isn't going to risk another journey until the smoke clears. It may be months—a year—before they attempt another landing. Maybe time enough to obliterate the trail completely. The time to act is *now!*"

"But where do we get a ship?" Johnny Cook said blankly.

"I can answer that, too. But the biggest question is this. Will the Cowards' Club take the assignment?"

Nobody spoke.

"All right," Tony said. "So I'll tell you about the ship. There's a space mercantile fleet at Alamagordo run by a fellow named Alfonso. They only have one star-drive ship, and she's no beauty. But she's serviceable, and with some work, can get us anywhere in the universe. Including Junus.

"Now Alfonso and his fleet ply quite a nice trade in the solar system. And every once in a while, Alfonso takes off in the star-driver and leaves

the galaxy. He always comes back with an empty cargo hold; claims he was out for nothing but fun."

Bill Clapper said: "What's the point, Tony?"

"The point is this. Alfonso and his star-driver got into a little engine trouble out our way before the *Columbine* business. I sent some help over, and they found out something mighty interesting. He's carrying cargo, all right—precious gems, mostly—neatly hidden in a false rocket in the tail. Our friend turns out to be an accomplished smuggler. One of the duties I was going to perform before the *Columbine* tragedy was to report him. But I never got around to it."

"So?"

"So Alfonso is waiting down in Alamagordo. Waiting for me to report to him—or blackmail him. So I plan to add another crime to my record. I'm going to blackmail him. The price is one ship."

Still, the Cowards' Club sat silent.

"We could leave before the year is out," Tony said fervently. "We could find out for ourselves what destroyed those ships—and keep it from happening again. Don't

you see? You've wanted a chance like this? Your lives are dedicated to a chance like this! Will you refuse it now?"

No one answered. Bill Clapper knocked his pipe against the ash tray. Johnny sipped his beer. Ranger and Goop studied their hands.

"Or was it all a joke?" Tony said harshly. "This Cowards' Club of yours? Were you just kidding yourself about its purpose? Is it just a crying society?"

His voice rose.

"Or are you happy to be cowards?"

Ranger broke the silence.

"I'm with you," he drawled.

"You betcha!" Goop Sawyer said.

Johnny Cook, the youngest member of the Club, drew himself up stiffly. "Me, too, Captain."

"And how about you, Bill? We can't get along without a navigator."

Bill Clapper grinned.

"You got one."

Alfonso was no trouble at all. With uncanny speed, he recognized the logic of Tony Flint's arguments, and "rented" his star-drive merchant ship at a nominal fee. The real trouble was getting the vessel in space-shape, and it took two weeks of vigorous

activity by the yellow-skinned members of the Cowards' Club to complete the task.

The final touch was added by Bill Clapper—the christening of the ship.

Goop lettered the name proudly on the side.

It was called the *White Feather*.

The launching date was set, with deliberate symbolism, at January first. By the time the moment arrived, the crew of the *White Feather* was keyed up by an excitement that years of loneliness and deprivation had seemingly destroyed for good.

At last, the very hour approached, and the star-driver was waiting for them in the desert of Alamagordo.

Blast-off hour was thirty minutes off when the message came from Alfonso's communication shack.

"Urgent," the radio voice said. "Captain Flint is wanted in Operations. This is urgent."

Tony swore, and climbed down the ladder of the *White Feather*, lifting the headpiece from his space suit. He strode across the hot sand and entered the jerry-built shed that Alfonso so grandiosely termed his "Operations center."

Alfonso himself was at the radio."

But he wasn't alone.

A space-suited figure, helmet concealing the features, was holding a revolver on him. Alfonso was trembling visibly, the neatly-trimmed mustache quivering beneath his nose.

"What the hell?" Tony said.

"Please, Captain!" Alfonso was sweating freely. "It's not my fault. This fella—he insists I call you out. What could I do?"

"What do you want?" Tony said gruffly.

"Passage." The voice that emerged from the headpiece was thin. "And I don't want you to refuse." The revolver turned on Tony.

"Passage? You're crazy! Who are you?"

"Don't ask so many questions!" The gun wavered slightly. "I must go with you—"

Then Tony knew.

"Trina!"

She lifted off the headpiece, and Alfonso gaped.

"I'm sorry, Tony. I didn't mean to be so melodramatic. But I had to stop you from leaving; this was the only thing I could think of."

"Not a bad thought," he grinned. "Only I'm afraid the idea's not too sound. I told



you, honey—this won't be any pleasure cruise."

"I'm not interested in cruises! I want to know why Joey died!"

"But we can't take you! The supplies—"

"I've brought my own. I'm ready to do anything, Tony. But I won't be left behind!"

Alfonso shrugged his shoulders, indicating his disbelief in the sanity of the world.

"Okay," Tony smiled. "I guess there's always room for one more . . ."

An hour later, the *White Feather* shredded the atmosphere and disappeared from Earth.

On the third of February, the *White Feather* made landfall on the planet Junus, the second world of the system which Earthmen called Motherstar.

Six planets circled the star in eccentric orbits. Of these, five were known to be inhospitable to Earth life, regardless of mechanical compensations. Some glowed embered, emanating heat like miniature suns. Others were mere globes of solid white ash, barren of even the smallest traces of sentience. But Junus had been classified as an Earth-type world, rich in atmosphere and Earth-green

vegetation. Less than 20,000 miles in circumference, its orbit made a "year" of 190 days, and its proximity to Motherstar indicated a single season of mild weather and sunshine.

In the view-screen of the *White Feather*, Junus was a friendly, welcoming sight; enough like Earth to stir Home Fever in a spaceman's breast.

But to the crew of the *White Feather*, to whom Home was purgatory, it appeared like the promise of a better future.

They made the landing in a softly swelling field of greenish, glinting sand. Ranger pulled the switch that exposed the recording panel on the side of the ship, and watched the gauges tell the story of Junus' atmosphere.

"Oxygen okay," Ranger drawled. "Carbon dioxide count's good, so's nitrogen. Figure we can breathe the stuff without boosters. Temperature's about seventy; couldn't be nicer." He turned to the others and grinned. "Regular Palm Beach," he said.

They unloaded supplies at the base of the ship. Trina shivered when she saw the high proportion of deadly weapons and explosives.

"Tony—do you think we'll need all this?"

He smiled at her, but his eyes were solemn. "I don't know. Landing here was easy enough, Trina. But getting off all right may be the problem. We have to be prepared."

"I don't see any signs of life. If there *are* inhabitants, couldn't they be hundreds of miles from here?"

"Possibly. We may have to do some cruising in order to make contact. But if there is intelligent life on Junus, they know we've landed. I imagine we won't have to do more than just wait around."

She shivered again, and he put his arm around her.

Night fell swiftly.

Motherstar, a dwarf with a pronounced blue corona, dropped rapidly below the horizon three hours after their descent. The crew took two-hour shifts of guard duty through the ten-hour Junus night.

Just when the first rays of sun were slanting over the horizon, Tony Flint found his shoulder being shaken.

"Captain!" Goop Sawyer was saying. "Wake up!"

"Huh?" He jumped to his feet, his palm slapping at the gun strapped to his waist. "What's wrong?"

"I'm not sure." Goop's ami-

able face was contorted. "I thought I was seein' things at first. Maybe I am!"

"What are you talking about?"

Goop pointed to a pyramid of small supply boxes. Tony followed his trembling finger, and saw one of the smallest of the crates floating some five feet in the air. Even as he watched, the crate descended gently and landed soundlessly on top of the pile.

"Everybody up!" Tony barked. "Rise and shine!"

The crew was on its feet in an instant, guns drawn.

"What's up?" Bill Clapper said.

"I don't know. But I got a feeling that our friends have arrived."

He told them about the floating crate, and they walked cautiously to the site. Tony picked it up, studying it curiously.

"Nothing but a drug crate," Ranger said. "Maybe it was some trick of gravitation—"

"Maybe so."

Then Trina screamed.

"Tony — Tony, something touched me!"

"What?"

They surrounded the excited woman, ringing her with a cordon that faced an

invisible opponent, their weapons pointing at nothing but the desert of Junus, now bright with sun.

"This is crazy!" Johnny said with a giggle. "There's nothing here!"

"There's something all right," Ranger drawled softly. "Take a look out yonder, to the left. See anything on the ground?"

"Can't make it out," Bill Clapper said. "Looks like—snakes."

Trina moaned.

"No!" Goop Sawyer shouted. "Those ain't snakes! Those are *chains*!"

Slowly, seemingly with an intelligence of their own, the trailing links of metal began to slither towards the crew of the *White Feather*. They watched in horrified fascination while the chains came towards them, trailing a light cloud of greenish, glinting dust; guided with the perfection of unseen hands.

Then the chains seemed to rear above them, like cobras about to strike.

The sight was too much for Goop Sawyer. He fired his gun at the writhing links, but failed to stop their inexorable progress.

"Inside the ship!" Tony shouted.

They scrambled for the

ladder, but the speed of the slithering links was now too great. One of the chains encircled Bill Clapper's leg, twisting about him with pythonlike tenacity, bringing him to the ground. Another caught Trina's waist, and her shriek of horror brought Tony to her side. The chain twisted in the air and closed around his neck, cutting off his wind. He shouted something to the others, but the command was choked in his throat.

Then the chain tightened, and the world was dark again.

It was Trina's gentle ministrations that brought Tony back to consciousness. When he felt her water-dampened fingers on his forehead, he reached out and grasped her wrist. Then he struggled into sitting position.

"What happened? Are you all right?"

"We're all fine," Trina told him. "They haven't hurt us—yet."

He tried to make it to his feet, but the deadly grip of the chains around his throat had squeezed energy from his body. He looked around, and saw the members of the Cowards' Club watching him with open anxiety.

"Where have they brought us?"

"Your guess is as good as ours," Ranger drawled. "It seems to be some kind of lead-lined storage house. Not more than a quarter of a mile from the *White Feather*. Door's over there, but it's mighty hard pushin'." He pointed to the crudely cut rectangle in the wall of their prison. There was a small aperture set in the center.

"Must have been a storehouse for radioactive materials," Bill Clapper said. "But have you noticed?—our new friends mean to keep us alive for a while."

He pointed to the trough on the floor. "Fresh water and some ricey kind of food. Help yourself, Captain."

"Have you seen them?" Tony said. "What are they like?"

"No," Bill Clapper said. "We haven't seen 'em, and I don't think we ever will. Those chains weren't remote-controlled, Tony. They were being handled by experts—invisible experts."

"Invisible?"

"That's why the crate floated," Ranger said. "Our friends just can't be seen. But on the way here, we saw a couple of them fooling around with space suits—*our*

space suits. They must have looted the ship."

"They filled the space suits pretty good," Johnny said. "They're humanoid. And they're silent as tombs—"

He looked frightened.

"We'll be okay," Tony promised. "If they're intelligent, we can always come to terms."

They waited in mounting impatience and increasing trepidation for another hour, but nothing happened.

Then Johnny Cook collapsed.

Trina ran to him first, and the head she lifted into her lap was strangely rigid—the eyes open and staring, the mouth working.

"Tony!" she screamed.

"Tony, what is it?"

"I don't know—" He slapped the boy's cheek, but with no response.

Then the voice emerged from Johnny Cook's throat.

"Earthmen," it said, and it was the voice of a stranger.

Ranger gulped. "Kid's talking in his sleep—"

"No!" Tony said. "Listen!"

"Earthmen," Johnny said again.

"Oh, Tony!" Trina clutched the captain's arm. "What's happened to him?"

"I'm not sure. But maybe Johnny's not talking at all.

Maybe it's *their* way of reaching us . . ."

The boy's mouth opened again, and the words that came forth were strangely precise and metallic.

"Earthmen, we know not your purpose. We know not if you come to us in peace or war. Our world is small and our people few. Our lives are too brief for fury. Our race has trembled too often on the brink of extinction. Speak now your purpose, creatures of Earth."

Tony blinked. Then he cleared his throat and said:

"Information. We seek only truth. We have lost comrades on your world; we seek to find out why."

The mouth opened again.

"Then hear our story. Our world knew happiness once. Our race was fruitful in the long ago. We walked our globe in solid flesh. We saw the faces of our loved ones and thought them beautiful. Then the monster Kotheel came, and plagued our world with fear and loathing."

"Kotheel?" Trina said. "What does he mean?"

"Who are you, speaker?"

"I am Var, Historian. I am Var of the old flesh. I speak to generations of Kotheel. When I am gone, others will

carry the warning to our race. For Kotheel dies not. Kotheel, the eater of souls."

"Who is Kotheel?"

"A curse. A being from the vaults of Hell. A parasite blown by the wind of space to our forsaken planet. Who knows now the beginning? Who lives to relate the start of terror? Too many stars have flickered and died since Kotheel came. Ten thousand cycles of sun have passed. Who knows the beginning?"

Now they heard the great age in the voice that emanated from Johnny's throat.

"The sands of our world have claimed us by the millions. But Kotheel lives on. Kotheel, the eater of souls."

"What is it?" Tony said. "What kind of monster is this thing?"

"Formless as the shape of fear. The victims must be slain, before the Kotheel spore can then infect us all."

"A parasite," Ranger muttered. "Makin' hosts out of the race . . ."

"Does that mean you weren't always invisible?" Tony asked.

"No. Invisibility was our defense; invisibility was the hope delivered to us by our science. An alteration in the genes of our bodies, an atomic invasion of our very struc-

tures. And we have frustrated the monster Kotheel, left him hungry and for solid flesh to possess."

"And the Earth ships?" Tony said. "What of the Earthmen who landed here before?"

"Why did you come, Earthmen? Your world is clean and good. Why do you scour the stars for new dangers?"

"The first ship that landed," Tony persisted. "The *Columbine*. What happened to it?"

"Kotheel," the voice said angrily. "When the ship descended, we knew the Kotheel monster would scream with pleasure at the solid meal set

before him. We knew the Earthmen would not leave without Kotheel."

"How horrible!" Trina said.

"And *did* Kotheel strike?" Tony said.

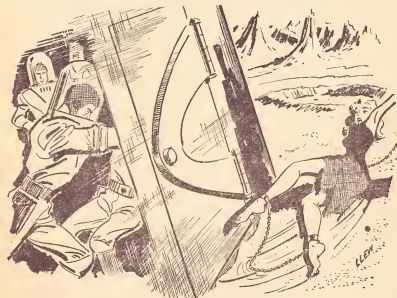
"There can be no doubt. The monster would not make his presence known for some hours—then the flesh itself would change, the eyes would glow, and soon the feasting would spread—"

"And those other ships?" Bill Clapper said.

"Our people destroyed them."

"But *why*?"

"Because they carried the spore of Kotheel! For once



Screaming, Trina was dragged away.

the monster strikes, *all* Earthmen would be hosts. We destroyed the spore of Kotheel alone."

Tony leaned back weakly. "So that's what happened. That's why Joe destroyed his ship!" He leaned forward again. "Listen to me, Var! The Kotheel monster is gone! The commander of the Earth ship which landed here must have realized what was happening to his crew. He destroyed it before it reached an Earth base. The Kotheel monster is no more!"

"A dream," the Historian sighed. "But even then, *all* the Kotheel spore has not been destroyed. Perhaps it yet lurks on our planet, waiting for more solid flesh to descend. That is why I wish to send you back to your people with this warning: *leave our world alone!*"

"Gladly," Tony said fervently. "When can we start?"

The ancient paused.

"When we have destroyed the Kotheel monster among you."

"What?"

"I am sorry," the old voice said gently. "We have learned by the lessons of centuries to recognize Kotheel. It may be far too late before its horror is plain to you. You must

realize that your friend was dead the moment Kotheel entered her body—"

"No!" Tony screamed.

But the massive door was already opening, and the chains were swiftly encircling the squirming figure of Trina.

When the spirit of Var broke contact with Johnny Cook's body, the boy crumpled to the leaden floor of their prison. The remaining crew members went to him quickly.

"What happened?" he asked them wildly. He clutched the captain's arm, his eyes imploring. "What did they do to me, Captain? I feel—drained. What did they do?"

"It's not important now, Johnny. The important thing is Trina—"

"What can we do about her?" Goop Sawyer said. "We haven't got a chance to save her, Cap. We'll be lucky to get out alive ourselves."

"If you ask me," Ranger said thoughtfully, "I think we're better off sittin' tight, Cap. The fella Var said he'd let us go. Figure that's about the best deal we can get out of this."

"No!" Tony raged. "We can't let it go at that! This Kotheel business has driven the race out of their heads.

You *know* Trina's no monster, Ranger!"

"Do we?" Bill Clapper said.

"Yes!" Tony whirled to him violently. "They just want a sacrifice. Don't you see? This Kotheel thing has become a religion to them. They have to make periodical bloodletting to appease their Devil. But they're not taking Trina!"

He ran to the great lead door, and looked out through the tiny aperture.

"Let's face the facts," Bill Clapper said softly.

"Facts!" Tony turned, his face livid. "What are you talking about? The only *facts* you care about are the kind you can hide behind! The only truth you can recognize is the kind that keeps you out of trouble! Don't forget the name of this little organization—the Cowards' Club!"

He stopped then, and their silence hurt.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled. "You know I didn't mean that—"

"Say!" Ranger snapped his fingers. "Maybe that door ain't such a barrier after all. I didn't see no locks or anything when they opened it before. Bet the five of us could swing it—"

"Then what?" Goop said gloomily. "Don't forget, Cap-

tain. They can see us, and we can't see them. That's one hell of an advantage. There could be *millions* of 'em outside this prison."

"I know," Tony said. "Our only hope lies in getting back to the ship. If they haven't stripped it clean by now."

"There's a batch of fire-rockets in the nose," Goop contributed. "Bet they have not found those. We could blast half this planet to pieces if we could get the *White Feather* into the air."

"Great," Johnny said. "But how?"

"I've got one idea." Tony walked back to them. "It may not work; it might even cost us the freedom Var promised. But if we're willing to risk it, we might all get out in one piece."

"We're listening," Ranger said.

"I'm thinking of the one thing these people seem to be most terrorized of."

"Kotheel!"

"Right. If Var was telling the truth, the word itself is enough to send these invisible characters scuttling for the hills. And if they think a Kotheel monster is loose in the vicinity—who knows? So we're going to create one of these Kotheel creatures of



these—right now. Any volunteers?"

"I don't get you," Bill said.

"One of us is going to pretend to be infected by Kotheel. The others are going to act like scared rabbits trying to get away. The chances are good that our invisible friends are going to share our terror—and leave us strictly alone. Think it's worth a chance?"

Ranger scratched his head. "I'm not much of a bluffer, Cap. But I used to play act a bit back home. I'll be your monster. Just tell me what to do."

"God only knows. Stiffen up your back. Sort of stare at us. Stagger along with your arm outstretched. Anything."

"Risky," Bill Clapper said. "They might try and kill us all—"

"Maybe. That's the chance I'm offering. It's no good unless we all vote for it, Bill. So what do you say?"

The older man grinned. "When did I ever say no?"

Tony beckoned, and the five crew members put their shoulders to the leaden door. Slowly, they felt the metal start to move. The captain put his lips to the aperture and set up a shout.

"Kotheel!" he screamed.

"Kotheel! Kotheel! Kotheel!"

Again and again, they drove their weight against the door.

Then it was open.

They were facing the sandy terrain of Junus once more. Over the rise of the hill, some two hundred yards away, they could see the white nose of the *White Feather*.

"Now!" Tony whispered, and burst through the doorway.

"Kotheel!" he screamed, running at full tilt, and throwing frightened glances over his shoulder. Behind him, fleet-footed despite his stockiness, came Johnny, shouting the dreaded word. Goop came chugging after him. The older man brought up the rear, puffing mightily, but still shrieking in mock terror: "*Kotheel! Kotheel!*"

Ranger's performance was magnificent. He staggered along the sands drunkenly, his long arms outstretched like a frenetic sleepwalker, his eyes wide and glowing in his bony face. He was giggling nervously as he pursued his companions.

By the time they reached the *White Feather*, they were winded and weak, and Goop Sawyer was almost hysterical

with relieved laughter. No hand had touched them, and no chains had whipped through the air to halt their run to freedom. The dread of Kotheel was real on the planet Junus—and its reality had delivered them into safety.

They climbed aboard and hurriedly examined their losses. The space suits were gone, trophies in the hands of the inhabitants. Some of the food containers had been opened, but the Junusians must have found Earth fare unpalatable. The water equipment was still intact, and so was all the radio gear. All weapons and explosives were gone.

"We still got the fire-rockets," Goop said.

"Great," Bill Clapper said sourly. "But I'd rather have the suits. If we run into anything on this return trip—"

"We'll keep our fingers crossed," Tony said. "Let's get started!"

They circled the small planet in less than an hour, the rockets roaring above the greenish desert of Junus. Tony watched the televue screen himself, scanning the monotonous plains and rippling hills and thin waterways for signs of the cere-

mony that would destroy Trina Savannah.

At last, a tableau appeared on the screen that made him shout instructions to the westerner at the controls.

"This is it? There's your Kotheel ceremony!"

They descended in an ever-decreasing arc, until the images in the screen grew sharp.

There were seven figures striding across the sand, walking with majestic slowness. Six of them wore space suits—the gear from the *White Feather*—but the seventh was virtually bare of clothing. A long chain extended between the woman and her captors, as if the Junusians were fearful of any contact with the monster they believed to be housed within her body. At that distance they seemed safe.

"There!" Tony said triumphantly. "Do you believe me now? This Kotheel is a religious demon to these people. They're dressing up in our clothing like savages in war paint and derby hats. This is nothing more than a human sacrifice—"

"Only six of 'em," Goop Sawyer said. "We could pick 'em off easy, Cap."

"Only six in space suits," Bill Clapper warned. "There

may be thousands of invisible ones."

Tony said: "Let's drop a rocket in front of them and see what happens."

"You betcha," Goop grinned.

He made the sighting with professional exactness and then squeezed the trigger. The nose rocket went whistling towards the sands of Junus. The warhead struck two hundred yards in front of the procession, and the cloud that rose sent particles of hot sand splattering against the hull of the *White Feather*, despite its altitude.

"Look at 'em run!" Goop shouted, with a whoop of pleasure.

"Descend two thousand feet," Tony said crisply. "Then let's hit 'em with another rocket. This one might do the trick—"

The second rocket tore a crater big enough to hide a space fleet. The space-suited Junusians were out of sight, and the girl was standing helpless on the sands, her hands to her head, looking towards the source of the bombardment.

"Set her down, Ranger! Close as you can come. That must be a pretty frightened girl down there . . ."

She was. When Tony ap-

proached her on the run, she sank in a heap on the ground, and had to be carried back to the *White Feather* ladder.

They left Junus behind, without one backward look at the planet of Kotheel.

General Bradford French couldn't be described as a good audience. He was used to commanding and directing, and these qualities made it trying for him to listen. But on the night of March 20th, Earth Reckoning, on Astertoid Base 41Y, he found himself listening long and hard to a strange story—told by an even stranger assortment of people. It was an extraordinary occasion.

Tony Flint lifted the tape recording from the machine, and waited for the general to speak.

"And that's the stolen tape from the *Guardian*?"

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry about the theft, sir. But at the time, I thought it was the most important thing in the world to prevent the truth from coming out."

The general made a dry noise. "I suppose you think that was very loyal of you, eh, Flint? Shielding a friend from disgrace. But it was the wrong thing to do—very much the wrong thing. Your

loyalty should be to the Command."

"I guess you're right. Only when it happened—I couldn't think straight, General."

"And this planet Junus? You still recommend we—" He bristled. "Hang out the no trespassing sign?"

"Yes, sir. The galaxy is full of uncharted worlds. I'm sure we can stand to lose this one. This Kotheel mania of theirs can only lead to a Holy War."

"Well," French said gruffly. "We're not crusaders. We'll let the U.N. decide that issue for themselves. And as for you, sir—"

There was a stir in the group sitting silently in the general's office—the four men and the woman leaning forward anxiously to catch the general's decision. The atmosphere was tense.

"As for you," French continued, making the most of the pronouncement, "I don't see any good reason why the court-martial verdict can't be reversed. As commanding officer, that's my prerogative—"

Tony grinned.

"But don't misunderstand! There are still some things you must account for. You've infringed many rules, no matter what your intent. We'll have to call a special session

of the appeal board to determine what action to take."

He cleared his throat hoarsely.

"Of course," he said vaguely, "I'm head of the appeal board, too."

Tony said: "There's just one more thing, sir—"

"Oh?"

"My friends—"

The square gray face hardened. "I'm sure you have reason to be grateful for their help. But don't press your luck too far. Remember—you were a coward only by consent."

On the other side of the room, the yellow-skinned members of the Cowards' Club bowed their heads.

"We'll arrange immediate transportation to Earth for your friends. But that's all I can do."

He stood up. "We'll antidote that yellow stuff just as soon as possible. It's no complexion for a Space Command Captain to wear..."

Gravely, they shook hands.

Just before dawn on 41Y, the *White Feather* blasted off.

Tony watched it disappear among the stars, and then strolled into the communications center. He listened dreamily to the familiar sounds of the electronic appa-

ratus, tracking the vessel as it made its way through the heavens. The radio operator, an old-timer named Morgan, pulled up a seat for him.

"Friends of yours, Captain?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Lucky people, headin' back for Earth. Ought to be nice and warm in Vermont right now. Spring just startin' to come in. Snow thawin' . . ."

"Not too lucky," Tony said.

"All a matter of opinion."

He was on his way out when the signal came.

"Hey, Captain!"

"What's up?"

"Getting SOS beeps from your friends' ship. Trying to make voice contact now—"

"Give me a headphone!"

The operator handed the equipment over, and Tony clamped it over his ears with a sickening feeling in his stomach.

"*White Feather* to 41Y . . . *White Feather* . . ." It was Bill Clapper's voice.

"Bill! Bill, this is Tony! What's wrong?"

"Trouble, Tony . . . made a bad guess . . ."

"What is it, Bill?"

"Var telling the truth . . . Kotheel . . ."

"Listen to me!" Tony's

voice shook. "Describe what's happening—"

"Not much time. Trina . . . began to change on way out . . . got Johnny—"

"Leave the ship!" Tony screamed into the microphone. "For God's sake, jettison out, Bill!"

"Not enough time . . . got 'em locked in the hold . . ."

"Jettison!" Tony said. "Get out of there!"

"Can't . . . can't leave the ship to them, Tony . . . Oh, God, you don't know what it's like . . . Tony, have to blow 'er . . ."

"You can't! Hold out! We'll send a ship—"

"They'll be infected, too . . . only one way, Tony. We talked it over, Ranger, and Goop . . . Joe Savannah had the right idea . . . have to jam the reactor . . . have to blow 'er . . ."

"Bill!"

Then the silence.

Morgan was staring at him.

"What is it, Captain? What happened up there? Are you all right?"

"Exoneration," Tony whispered.

"What?"

"Nothing . . ."

THE END

# PUZZLE IN YELLOW

By RANDALL GARRETT



GHEVIL of Archeron dropped his spaceship silently down through the night. For five rotations of the planet, he had been watching the natives.

The planet looked ripe for plucking. If their defenses and general state of development were as poor as he thought, the hordes of Archeron could overwhelm them.

It was a particularly beautiful world; the third planet from its primary, with large seas, and broad green conti-

nents. The inhabitants were fairly intelligent, because he could see cities easily from space. But it was obvious that they had not yet developed space travel. It looked as though they would be easy to crush.

But he had to be sure. Before he could return to Archeron to report his find, he would have to investigate the planet more closely.

He had decided not to land near any of the big cities; such a concentration of population might be dangerous.

He wanted an out-of-the-way spot which he could investigate at leisure without running too great a risk of being detected. Finally, he had found what was obviously a military installation. It was a heavy, stone-walled fortress that appeared to have no energy screens around it; obviously these beings had not developed ray projectors yet.

He smiled grimly to himself as he settled his invisible ship silently into a wooded area less than half a mile from the big fortress. All he would have to do was get inside the fortress and take a look around. He'd soon know what sort of opposition the hordes of Archeron would have to overcome.

Hovering smoothly on anti-gravity beams just above the treetops, Ghevil checked his instruments. Good! There were no signs of any kind of detection radiation. These people obviously hadn't even developed radar yet; if they had, they would surely use it to protect a fortress like this one.

Ghevil applied two of his eyes to a binocular telescope.

It was a military fortress, all right. There were armed men at the walls, and sentries pacing back and forth at

their posts. He was unfamiliar with the weapons they carried, but they were quite obviously crude; they couldn't be ray rifles.

All that night, Ghevil watched the fortress, checking the sentries, investigating the defenses, and making notes on the layout of the place.

When dawn came, he lowered his ship to the ground in the woods. Relying on his invisibility at night was well and good, but he didn't know enough about these beings yet. They might have eyes that responded to different radiations than his own; they might—just *might*—be able to see the ship.

From the woods, he watched the fortress by day. Once, he saw a detail of soldiers march out of the big gate. It was easy to tell the enlisted men from the officers by the uniforms they wore. The enlisted men, who were following the officer's orders, wore light gray uniforms, while the officer wore a uniform that was somewhat darker.

Ghevil studied the beings closely. It would be fairly easy to imitate one of them. They had only two eyes, but Ghevil could see as well with two eyes as he could with four—at least for awhile.

Imitating the pinkish color of their skin would be easy, too. There would be nothing to it.

That evening, Ghevil spent his time poring over his notes, trying to devise a plan to enter the fortress. It was well past midnight when he heard the crunch of footsteps in the woods. He turned on his visiscreen and looked out. In the moonlight, he could see one of the natives. It was a soldier, an enlisted man, by his uniform. Ghevil chuckled softly to himself. Here was his chance! A soldier outside the fortress for a stroll!

He watched the soldier for a moment. The being was carrying a hand weapon of some kind; it was best to take no chances.

Aiming one of the death ray projectors on the outside of his ship was the work of a second. He pressed the stud, and the silent, lethal beam dropped the soldier in his tracks.

Ghevil stepped out and walked over to the corpse. Within a matter of minutes, he had changed his appearance completely; he now looked exactly like the dead thing at his feet. Then he stripped off the gray uniform and donned it. He took the handgun from the corpse's limp

hand and then took the body inside his ship, where the atomic disintegrators burned it to nothingness in three seconds.

Now he was ready. All he would have to do was walk back to the fortress and go in through the gate. There was no need to know whether there were any passwords. If he were within five feet of any sentry, he could read its mind easily. It would be very simple to pass himself off as one of the soldiers.

Boldly, he walked toward the fortress.

He was twenty yards from the wall when a sudden, odd wailing sounded through the air. He stopped, puzzled. What did it mean? Suddenly, a light came on, sweeping the ground around the fortress with a powerful beam.

Ghevil realized that something had gone wrong. Quickly, he turned and ran for the protection of the woods.

He was too late. The searchlight beam hit him, and was followed quickly by a chattering roar. Something hit Ghevil in the back, throwing him to the ground. He tried to lift himself, but another something and then another slammed into his body. A final one smashed into his brain.



Ghevil of Archeron shuddered and died. His last thought was that now his report would never reach Archeron at all.

Jim Galloway stared down at the body the men had brought into the infirmary. "He's wearing Mike's uniform, and he looks like Mike,

but Mike never had *yellow blood!* Who do you suppose he is, Captain?"

The Captain of the Guards shook his head. "I'm damned if I know, Warden. But if it's one of them flying saucer men or something, why would he try to put on an escaped prisoner's uniform and break into a prison?"

**THE END**



**A MUMMY  
ROSE  
FROM  
HIS  
CRYPT!**



An ancient belt was the clue to how a mummy could rise from his tomb! The creature terrified many . . . but is sure to astound and amuse you in this truly different story: "THE MUMMY TAKES A WIFE," by Clyde Mitchell. It's typical of the excitement and enjoyment you'll find in December FANTASTIC.

**BE SURE TO BUY YOUR COPY OF FANTASTIC TODAY!**

**ON SALE AT ALL NEWSSTANDS—ONLY 35¢**



The music was an all-encompassing cloud—hypnotizing—enchanted.

*Manhattan's Greenwich Village is a reputed haven for odd-balls, geniuses pseudo and otherwise, phonies and frantic talents, sad children and happy octogenarians. Strange creative nightmares result, and probably the strangest of all was the—*

# Concerto For a Pink Elephant

By B. B. LIVINGSTON

THE bartender at Freddie's phoned me just before I left on my assignment. His plea to "Come get Reilly out of the joint" fell on deaf ears. The circus was opening at the Garden and I was to interview Waite Hunt, the famous leader of the circus band.

Reilly would have to wait till I was done with the interview.

I said, "All right, George. All right. If I know Reilly he's pretty much hung over by now. And if he's at his

usual back table let him stay there till I pick him up. He can't do too much harm."

"No-o . . . ?" groaned the voice on the phone. "He's talking about those pink elephants of his and wants to play for them . . ."

I cut him off. "I haven't got time to talk, George. Give him another bottle of vino, and I'll square the tab when I get there. In a couple of hours," I added.

At the Garden I learned my interview had been sandwich-

ed between those of someone from *Life* magazine and somebody else from *Reader's Digest*. I thought of going back to talk to Barna, the master of ceremonies, while waiting for Hunt, when I spotted Ted Karakas of the *News* and Johnny Evvans of the *Mirror*.

Ted saw me at the same instant, and called me over. "Living it up, huh?"

"Isn't every day I get an interview with Hunt," I said.

Evvans smiled. "Big deal. Say, Ed, what's this talk about you being on the wagon?"

"Right up there with the driver."

Ted said, "Johnny and I got what we came for. We were just going across to Halloran's for a short one. If you think one won't do any harm we'll stick around till you're through?"

It sounded like what I needed. It had been weeks since I had a drink. I thought, Hell! there isn't anything Hunt could tell me I didn't know. It'd be easy enough to fake an interview. Besides, I had no idea how long that *Life* man would be there. There would be pictures taken . . . I suggested that maybe it would be a good

idea to go now instead of waiting.

Halloran's is a long, narrow, high-ceilinged bar close to Madison Square Garden. The gambling and fight crowd hang out there, and the talk is always fights, horses or women. At that time of the morning, however, there wasn't much doing. We found three stools together, and Ted called the bartender. He was a Swede named Olson that everyone called Murphy.

Ted said, "Murphy, I'd like you to meet Ed Loring, that *real gone* music critic from the most famous sheet . . ."

"Yeah," Murphy said. "That's what I hear all day. What'll it be?" he asked, not at all impressed.

Ted's deep brown eyes went wide. He lifted his thin narrow shoulders till they were almost touching his ears. He turned, gave me a quick wink. "That's what comes of working in a place like this, Ed. Your view becomes as narrow and constricted as the confines of this bar. Do horse players and fighters know of the finer, more noble pursuits? Hah! Now my friend, Johnny Evvans, can talk by the hour on the merits of Ivy League football as opposed to Big Ten kind. The word of an old

Boola-Boola football hero, Johnny will tell you."

Evvans had been a Yale gridiron star ten years ago. But he still liked to wear his hair crew-cut, bought his clothes at Brooks Brothers, and went for workouts at the Yale Club three times a week. He was a big man but he wore his bigness with an easy grace and it took a long time of ribbing to get him angry.

"The trouble with you," Johnny said easily, "is that you do so much talking we're always six drinks up on you before you're aware of it. You know what happens then?"

I said: "Let me remind him. He'll want those six drinks lined up on the bar all at once. Then he'll go down the line, one after the other, until there *ain't* no mo'. And we'll wind up lugging his supine and stinking body to his hotel again."

"So now everybody's had their little say," Murphy broke in, "what'll it be?"

We agreed that "Gibsons all around" would suit us fine. A half dozen Gibsons and two hours later I remembered Reilly, and that he was still down at Freddie's waiting for me.

It had been a long time since I had so much to drink.

Or maybe the Gibsons were extra powerful. But I had to grip the bar for balance for a second or two before starting to the door.

"Hey!" Ted Karakas became aware I was leaving. "Where the heck do you think *you're* going?"

"Got to meet someone in the Village."

"Woman . . . ?"

"No . . . Just a friend."

"You mean that crazy fiddle player Reilly?"

I waved a hand at them. "I'll see you guys."

Karakas laughed. I didn't like the sound of it. He said: "Something mighty strange about you two . . ."

I turned, drew back my right hand and started to let go. Evvans grabbed me and swung me away, holding me close in an effective bear hug. "Easy, Ed. *Easy* does it." He turned his head to Karakas. "Why the hell do you have to get nasty?"

"I wasn't getting anything. I just think it's funny, him and that fiddler. Like him and that great concerto he's always *going* to write. That's what I think's funny."

"Lemme at him," I begged, trying to break Evvans' hold on me.

Evvans wrestled me to the door. "I'll take care of your

tab," he said, as he shoved me into the street. "Go on, now. And forget about Ted. He'll be sorry as hell in a little while."

"Sure," I said. "He always is . . . afterward."

The two wooden tubs flanking the basement stairs to Freddie's hold a pair of withered planks sunk in cracked and crumbling earth. I flipped my cigarette into the right-hand tub as I went down. George spotted me and jerked a thumb in the direction of the rear of the bar.

Reilly had waited for me.

"Did he give any trouble?" I asked.

"No. Just went to sleep after he finished the bottle. But I wish you'd get him out of here. I don't like for him to sleep here. This ain't no Bowery dive. I just don't want him sleeping here."

My eyes, accustomed now to the change of light, noticed the man at the table had his head on his folded arms. I walked over and sat across from him. A strong odor of wine came from him. I hunched forward over the table. "Reilly," I said softly.

His head lifted slowly. For an instant, as always, I was startled by the first sight of that face. It was long, bony,

narrow, with a thin-lipped cruel mouth, eyes dark and piercing in their look, with something wild and animal-like in their depths. His uncombed black hair hung in an uneven line across the narrow stark forehead.

His smile was a sidewise twist of his lips. He never showed his teeth in a smile. "You took your own sweet time coming here, didn't you?" he asked.

I shook my head.

He sniffed with thin hairy nostrils. "Hey! You smell ripe. Gin. My boy fell off the wagon."

I said, "I want you to play for me today."

"Nah. I don't want to play. I want to get drunk."

"Afterward."

"Okay. Let's both get drunk. That last bottle of vino sobered me up. Ed, tell me how good I am, hunh? Use the ginny talk. Ed . . ."

"No!"

"I don't like it when you get drunk, Ed. You get mean."

I said, "I heard you gave George trouble, told him you were seeing pink elephants."

"He's nuts. I said if I didn't get another drink I'd start seeing them."

I took a deep breath and leaned back in the chair. I

had a sudden desire to hit him, and I closed my eyes, fighting off the pressure of blood pounding at my temples. After a little while I felt better. I opened my eyes and saw he was staring at me, a look of pleading in his eyes.

"Tell me how good I am, Ed. You know . . ."

"You're not good," I said in a low voice. "You're *great!* The greatest. You do things Paganini would have had pride in doing. When you play *accelerando* it's nerve shattering. In *dolce*, in *andante*, when it's *comodo* there is never a question as to mood. A passage *giovale* brings laughter, when its *fuoco* I burn with anger, when it's *pianissimo* I think of children playing. And all on a fiddle that if you paid twenty bucks for you got robbed."

I used to think you were giving me a rib the first times you told me how good I was. Like the rest of 'em. But you always come back to the twenty-buck fiddle. That's how I know it's for real. The *twenty-buck fiddle!*

"Plays better than the thousand-dollar one you had, hunh, Ed?"

Suddenly I felt the need of a drink. Tessie, the day wait-

ress, was sitting at the bar, putting platinum-colored nail polish on the nails of her left hand. I called to her. She waved her hand in the air as she came to us.

"Yeah?"

"I'll take what he's drinking," Reilly said.

"Two ryes," I said.

She continued to wave her hand gently as she went to get our orders. She put the glasses of whiskey before us and the water chasers besides the whiskey. Then she returned to her seat at the bar blowing softly on her nails, trying to dry the polish.

I said, "You stink! Water doesn't cost anything. You could at least bathe once in a while. And get a haircut, and a clean shirt. There are nights you make twenty bucks out of those Third Avenue joints you play. There's no reason you can't be clean."

"Would that make me play better on the twenty-buck fiddle?"

"Shut up! Shut up about the fiddle!"

"Sure, Ed. Sure. You got that paper with you today? You know, the lined kind that you make the pot-hooks on?"

"Yes."

"That means we're going to get drunk. I like that. May-



be I'll see my pink babies after all?"

After the smoothness of the Gibsons the rye had a harsh burning rawness. But it cleared the fog that had been gathering in my brain. I knew that all I needed was one more. Just one more and I could think with crystal clearness. Reilly could say what he wanted, tell me anything, but I would be ready for the pink elephants when they came.

The second drink put a vacant grin on Reilly's lips.

He said, "I been drinkin' all night, Ed. You said you'd see me this morning. Where you been?"

"To the circus. It's opening this afternoon. I had to see someone."

"The circus? . . . Did you see the elephants?"

"Yes," I lied. "And they're not pink, nor small. They're big and gray. And they stink. But not like you. No, not like you. Nothing does. When you get a lot of them together, like they have over at the Garden, it's like being in the jungle. It's not like being at the zoo where they have *one* caged behind thick bars and you're brave and prove it by throwing peanuts at him. And when they come out in the

center ring, twenty, twenty-five of them, maybe, and they start that weaving chuffling motion, you forget it's a circus. You're in a jungle clearing. A blazing sun is trying to fry your brains to a crisp. You can't stop from sweating. And the bugs and flies are swarming over you thick as the grass covering your feet to your knees.

"Then a whistle blows. A man in a red coat and white pants and shiny patent-leather boots cracks a whip. And you're back at the circus again, laughing at a circle of large and small elephants doing a dance."

"They really dance? Like mine do? I never been to a circus, Ed . . ." His eyes were staring into space. "One time I went to the Bronx Zoo. Only thing I knew about elephants was from pictures. I made up my mind I was gonna see one. Like you say, he was behind big bars. He was gray, too . . . yeah. You know, I think he liked me. There was a big crowd, but I stood over by myself to one side. And he came over and stood in front of me. I had my fiddle with me. I think, maybe he'd like to hear me play. So I took out the fiddle and I make up a tune. And you know, he starts to dance. I swear! He

starts to dance! The crowd's eatin' it up. But it don't last long. A cop comes over and breaks it up, tells me he'll throw me in the can, tells me to beat it . . ."

There were tears in his eyes.

Everything was crystal-clear now. I knew exactly what I was going to do. I said: "For a year now you've been telling me about these pink elephants of yours. I must have bought you a couple of barrels of whiskey, spent a hundred nights listening to your crazy talk, dragged you away from dozens of fights, and from I don't know how many of those fat floozy blondes you manage to get hanging around when you get hold of a couple of bucks. You talk about those pink elephants as if they were real. But they're not. They're just the crazy imaginings of that drink-soaked brain . . ."

"No! Don't say that. I see 'em. I see 'em all right. But I never did till I got this fiddle."

"You told me. A long time ago. About the pawnshop, about the crazy old man who died the day after he sold you the fiddle. You've got me crazy with those elephants of yours. I've been writing this concerto for a year and it's

not done. It's not done because the last of it is the *dance of the pink elephants!* What pink elephants? I bring you home and put toothpicks between my eyelids to keep them open so I won't fall asleep. I wait for you to have your dt's. And all you do is *howl, scream, laugh*, with your fiddle on your lap. Never *once* have you played a single note. Never *once*."

His face lowered into sullen lines. "I can't help it if they won't come out while you're there. They do when I'm alone, that's for sure."

"All right. I wasn't going to let you get drunk tonight. I was going to go the rounds with you and keep you sober. But maybe it's better that you do get drunk. Yes, maybe it will be better. Then when you're falling down drunk I'm going to take you home and make you play. Not just wait for you to start seeing them. It will only be like it always is. This time you'll make them come out by playing for them. I want to hear this tune you talk about. I want to hear the dance you play for them!"

"Maybe they won't come out?"

"They'd better. Because if they don't you and I are all

through. No more whiskey for Reilly, not from me, anyway. You won't like that. And who's going to tell you how great you are? Who will even *dream* of your greatness? I'm the only one who knows, but I've got to know it all. Understand, Reilly?"

He gave me that sidewise knowing grin. "I get it, Ed. Le's go out and drink up the town."

I don't know how many taverns we went to. Surely all between Eighth Street and Twenty-third on Third Avenue. It was like a hundred other nights. Reilly went through his repertoire of Irish jigs, of cornball hill-billy tunes, his improvisations on one and two strings. I'd heard them all. Had taken from them what I wanted.

I couldn't get him drunk.

Perhaps he'd drunk himself sober the night before? I knew only that he had reached the morose quarreling stage where a wrong word meant a fight. We were in a place on the corner of Third Avenue and Eleventh Street. The time was a few minutes past eight. The place was noisy and crowded, the TV set blasting in competition to the human voices. Someone had asked him for a

tune and he had refused with a sullen voice.

We were in a booth toward the rear. The aproned waiter came over and stood beside the table picking at his teeth with a paper match. I reached for money and learned I had only a handful of change left.

Reilly glanced at the change in my palm and said: "Let's get some wine and blow this joint. I'm fed up with it."

They sold wine by the quart and half-gallon. The thought of drinking wine made me shiver in disgust, but I told the waiter to bring a quart of muscatel.

"Let's take it over to my place," Reilly said.

He lived in a cold-water flat in a four-story walk-up on Tenth Street just off Greenwich. It was an eyesore of a building, with scabrous red paint peeling in flakes and chunks from the raw brick. His home was a single room on the fourth floor at the rear of the building. I stood in the open doorway feeling waves of nausea at the foul odor that struck me when Reilly opened the door. It was always like that.

He tossed the fiddle case on the bed, and went to the small sink that stood in the corner. The bed was an iron

cot that stood below the single window of the room. A stripped dirty mattress covered the bed. There was a backless stool close to the bed. I slumped into it, put my elbows on my knees and brought my hands up to my face. I didn't want to look at the room, at the filth that lay in the sink, at the strained splattered walls.

I never wanted to.

"Open the bottle," Reilly said. "I'll bring the glasses."

"Wash them first," I said.

"What for? They'll only get dirty."

"Wash them."

"Okay! Okay. Here . . ."

He gave me one of the tumblers and held out the other for me to pour the wine. The bottle was half empty when I put it down beside me. He flopped on the bed, facing me, and put the glass to his lips. When he put the glass down it was empty. I didn't touch my drink, only sat and stared at him.

And suddenly he was drunk.

"What if they don't come?" he asked.

"I told you what I'd do."

"No, you wouldn't do that. Not to Reilly." He shook his head. It moved loosely on the thin sinewy neck. "Nah! You

just talk. I know you, you *phony*! Think I haven't watched you putting those little pot hooks down on the paper. Who you kiddin', your music? It's mine. *Mine!*" He banged his chest with his fist. "How come you didn't tell me how great you're going to make me? Gonna see to it I play at, uh, Carnegie Hall. That's the joint, ain't it? Why 'cause *you* never made it, hunh? Even with the thousand-buck fiddle. You never made it because you ain't got this much music in you." He put his thumb against the tip of his index finger to show me how much. "You're not even a good music reporter. But I'm your friend. I won't tell . . ." he fell backward on the bed, his head slamming the wall with a dull thud.

He knew. He had always known. But I didn't care. Once the last of the concerto, the dance of the pink elephants had been written, I would be through with Reilly. If only he had the dt's and saw them. I turned, blinking in the light of the hundred-watt bulb shining nakedly above the sink. It hurt my eyes. I remembered seeing some thick candles on the shelf above the sink. They were still there.

I placed one each in the

mouths of a couple of empty wine bottles, lit them, and turned off the light above the sink. Then I brought them back with me to the chair beside the bed and placed them to either side of me as I flopped into the chair.

And suddenly it was as if there were weights attached to my eyelids. I couldn't keep them open, try as I might.

I couldn't stay awake.

The sound of movement wakened me. For some reason I looked at my watch. Thirteen minutes past nine. A streak of purple light brightened the room. Seconds later, the rumble of thunder in the distance warned of a storm about to break. But this was in the background of awareness. My attention was rivetted to the bed and the man sitting erect. Reilly was sitting up staring blankly before him with the look of a somnambulist. His eyes were wide open but I could swear they saw nothing. He began a low murmur of words and I leaned forward to catch their meaning.

"There's something quite wrong," he whispered. "My babies are scared . . ." His right hand, limp on the filthy mattress, groped for and found the fiddle case. He pull-

ed it up to the bed and opened it. He continued to look blindly into a world of his own. "Easy babies, easy. Reilly'll play for you . . ."

And now I knew! He saw his elephants in a dream world. Not the demented and mad world of the dt's, but in a place exclusively his, to which only he had entree. I got my pen out, laid the ruled paper on my knees, and waited.

He slid off the bed and stood erect beside me. His face was still blank, his eyes still staring. He brought the fiddle up and began to play, a simultaneous *pizzicato* and bow passage that ended as abruptly as it had begun. The opening of the dance? . . . No! It was as if, rather, he was demanding attention.

"Don't be scared," he whispered again. "Reilly'll play for you and maybe you'll dance, huh? . . ."

I wrote as he played, music such as I'd never heard, music such as I never believed existed. And suddenly my fingers stiffened so I couldn't move them. And the room was filled with the heavy odor of animal musk and the air was thick and damp and fetid as if in a jungle. I looked up into the staring eyes of Reilly, then away into that

distance so real to him. And saw what he saw. A herd of elephants in a sawdust clearing. They were milling about as if in panic. Beyond them, though dimly, I somehow felt rather than saw row on row of seats filled with people.

But it was the herd of elephants took my attention.

For as Reilly continued his gentle coaxing chords their panic stilled. And slowly, clumsily, yet with an odd grace of movement, they began a shuffling rhythmic dance. I don't know how long they danced, only that the music faded to a *pianissimo* ending.

And with its end the vision faded.

There was only the splattered paint-peeled wall of the room.

But now I knew. It wasn't Reilly! It was the fiddle! The twenty-buck fiddle that he had gotten from that old man who had died the day after he sold it. A Devil's fiddle, but one I had to have. It wasn't right that a wine-soaked rummy like Reilly should be able to coax such music from it. No! *I had to have that fiddle!*

I said, "Reilly! Reilly!"

He shook his head a couple of times.

I reached out, shook him.

He pulled away, looked down with sudden recognition.

"You! What the hell are you doing here? . . ." He noticed the pad on my knees. "Been waitin' for me to fall asleep, hunh?"

He was still drunk, it seemed. I liked that. I had to get him a bit more so. I knew my credit was good at a liquor store down the street. All I had to do was talk Reilly into letting me get him a bottle of wine . . . "Yeah," I made it sound casual. "Hey! How about another bottle of wine?"

He staggered a little, recovered. "Sure. 'Nother bottle wine."

I put the pad and pen away, got up, went to the door. I tried not to act concerned. "Be back in a little while. Don't go away." I laughed. He didn't think it was funny. He only scowled a little deeper.

"Get the wine, will ya?"

I saw the flames a half block away. As I came at a run I kept looking up, counting the windows. It was Reilly's room. A man and woman, the man in pajama bottoms, the woman in a nightgown, staggered down the stairs as I started up. Already the stair well was fill-

ing with smoke and the dull crackling sound of fire, and now and then the shouts of people. A man on the third floor was running down the hall shouting warnings. There was a small group of people on the landing all staring upward. Someone tried to hold me. I shook the hand off, lowered my head and continued.

The smoke was thick and oily above. Reilly's door was open. The room was lit by an orange glare. I stopped short at the door. Reilly was backed into a corner furthest from the fire, but also furthest from me. The bed was a flaming mass. I could visualize what happened. The candles I had placed beside the bed . . . Reilly had tumbled into the bed after I left, upsetting the bottles. Somehow, they had ignited the mattress, the chair. He had managed to get out of bed, but drunkenly staggered to the wall instead of toward the door. His escape was cut off.

He had the fiddle in his hand. We looked at each other across the flames. Above the sound of the fire there came the siren sounds of fire engines. "Reilly!" I tried to gain his attention. He shook his head, gave me a lopsided grin. "Along the

wall," I directed. "You got a chance, man!"

I started in, but had to stagger back as the flames and smoke billowed toward me, driven by the draft of open window and door. I could still see Reilly. Suddenly he brought the fiddle up to his chin, put the bow into position. And began to play a dirge. And now the flames reached a curtained alcove, set the curtain ablaze, and behind it I saw the open cans of paint, the half-gallon of alcohol he kept as insurance for a night of drinking should he not have money. If the flames reached them . . .

I ducked my head, went into the room, sliding close to the wall.

But instead of coming to meet me he moved back toward a corner. He had stopped playing. We looked at each other for the last time. His eyes were somber, no longer wild.

"No! It's too late. Get out. Get out quick. You got what you wanted, that concerto . . ."

He knew.

I backed away, back to the door, back to safety. As I reached the door the inflammables in the alcove exploded. Streamers of fire shot into the blazing room, adding to

the fury. I staggered back into the hall, coughing. As I made my way down the stairs the first of the firemen passed me on their way up.

Reilly was dead when they brought him down. His right hand was tightly closed around the throat of the fiddle, all that was left of it. . . .

Tom Garrison, a reporter on general news assignment, passed me on the way into the office.

"Where you been?" he asked.

"Why?" I asked with indifference.

"You missed it. I just got back. From the Garden. What a story! That storm we just had. Well, the elephants got scared and started out of control. Imagine! Twenty-five of them charging like crazy in the Garden. It could have caused a panic. And all of a sudden they started to dance. I swear. To dance. Greatest thing I ever saw. . . ."

Tom was a good reporter. Looking at his watch would

have been a natural reflex.

"What time was this, Tom?"

"Fifteen minutes after nine."

I could only shake my head.

"Hey!" he said. "You look like you've been covering a fire."

"The most tragic fire I've ever seen," I said. I pushed past him and went into my office. I pulled out the ruled sheets and went to work. It was morning by the time the last note was down on paper. I read it over carefully, then laid it aside and turned to my typewriter. But after a moment I knew it was no use. No one would believe the story of Reilly and the fiddle, the story of a man who in his sleep calmed the panic of a herd of elephants in Madison Square Garden.

I turned again to the music I had written. I scratched out what had been on the credit corner and wrote instead:

"Concerto for a Pink Elephant," by William Patrick Reilly.

THE END

---

READ

FANTASTIC

Science Fiction At Its Best!



# SERVICE ELEVATOR

By SAM MERWIN, JR.

*Elevators are supposed to do two things: they go up, and then they go down—or maybe in reverse order. But this one wasn't called a service elevator for nothing. It took its responsibilities seriously and almost any service you wanted performed was strictly its dish. But even servants become temperamental.*

THERE were times when Jerry Hale wondered how he had ever managed to work himself into such a job—and this was one of those times. Essentially, Jerry was a contact man, a salesman, a promoter, a man who used an office only as a mail-drop and a place to take an occasional telephone call. So here he was, as he had been for the past two years, chained to a desk in an office of *Research Development, Inc.* The fact that it was a magnificent

blond-mahogany desk in a magnificent blond-mahogany office fitted with every conceivable gadget for modern material comfort, from sound-proofed ceiling to built-in bar, didn't alter the basic harsh truth of incarceration.

"I'm only a prisoner in a blond-mahogany cage, an un-beautiful thing to see . . ."

He hadn't meant to say it aloud, but he must have. Rhoda Carlin's sleek strawberry-blonde head came up from contemplation of the



The elevator rocketed through time and space.

stenographer's pad on her knee, and her lush, vermillion lips said with only the faintest trace of mockery, "You want me to put that in the letter to Mr. Finkelberg, Jerry?"

"If I told you where I'd like you to put it, the crash of your illusions would shatter the silence of this mausoleum," he told her.

"You worry about Mr. Finkelberg, and I'll worry about my illusions—what's left of them," was the devastating retort.

As he resumed dictation, Jerry realized with a slight taste of ashes that Rhoda was one reason for his self-incarceration. Rhoda was a looker, all the way down. She was prompt, reliable, level headed and efficient. She was also insolent, overbearing and possessed of a remarkably even disposition—as far as Jerry had been able to discern in the course of their two-year association, it was always bad.

The only times he had seen her smile were when something went wrong—preferably painfully for him, like the occasion when he had been bushwhacked by the wastebasket and removed a strip of veneer from his desk with the bridge on his nose.

That time, he had actually heard through dazed ears, the peal of her silvery laughter.

It had become a game with him to make her laugh again—preferably without agony for himself. But he had thus far failed. His most carefully thought-out efforts to win her approval were received with sublime indifference. He had wanted to date her from the first moment she walked into R-D, Inc.—but how did you go about dating a girl who obviously zoned you somewhere between a square and a moldy fig? There were moments when he almost wished he weren't in love with Rhoda.

The letter to Mr. Finkelberg finished, he said, "What else is on the docket, Rhoda?"

She had already risen, revealing in the process the utterly luscious figure that had put the frustrating word *drool* into his dreams. Glancing at him over her shoulder, she replied, "Mr. Doheny wants to see you for a moment—and that Willy character is waiting outside."

There was a flash of something—was it gloat or mere incipient triumph?—in the slightly tilted violet eyes that warned him nothing pleasant lay in store for him.

He said, "Okay, Rhoda, tell Park I'm free if he wants to see me. I'll buzz you to send Mr. Willy in the moment I'm through."

She shrugged as she reached for the doorknob. Jerry could have sworn she muttered something suspiciously like, "Means nothing to me." Rhoda's attitude was as expressive as any words, so he couldn't be sure. He thought, *Some day, you fresh witch—some day*, but he wasn't really very confident. Two years could constitute quite a wilting process.

Parker Doheny popped in. He was round, rosy and, as usual, a-burble with enthusiasm. He was also Jerry's partner and the real reason for his having to stay chained to a desk. Parker was an awesomely brilliant idea man and all-around scientist—with about as much practical money or business sense as a child of two. The very thought of taking a trip and leaving Park in charge gave Jerry gooseflesh—it gave him visions of hard-won capital flowing into bottomless funnels labeled *Perpetual Motion* or *Portable Hole* or *Vegetable Metals*. So it was Park Doheny who took the trips while Jerry sweated things out,

chained to his desk and Rhoda's sneers.

The *Research Development, Inc.*, was exactly what it sounded like. The purpose of the firm was to put inventors—or scientific idea men as Jerry preferred to call them—in touch with laboratories or commercial firms where their ideas could be developed and put to use and profit. It was a small but successful and rapidly growing outfit. It filled a basic need, not only for scientists, but for firms whose budgets did not run to vast outlays for free research.

Park Doheny was glowing. With totally false modesty, he laid upon Jerry's desk what looked like a certified check on lingerie-pink paper. It was a certified check from the *Magnum Corporation*, made out to *Research Development, Inc.*, in the amount of \$50,000.02.

Jerry was impressed, although he had no desire to show it. "What are the two cents for?" he asked mildly.

"I've been wondering, myself," said Doheny blandly. "Well, this time old woolly-head, as I understand from Miss Carlin you have been heard to call me, came through. This is for that little unrefillable bottle top you

told me would never sell. It will cover our outlay to Garretson, pay him a fat fee and leave us five grand commission."

"Nice going, Park," said Jerry sincerely. He added solemnly, "Not even I can be right all the time." No wonder, he thought, Rhoda had been more superior than usual—she knew he had screamed his head off when Park took on Garretson and his unrefillable bottle top.

The buzzer sounded. He flipped the switch and Rhoda's dulcet vitriol sounded in his ears. "Mr. Willy is getting impatient," she said. "Shall I send him in?"

It was a tactless blunder—if it was a blunder. Right at the moment when his impractical partner was indulging in a bit of deserved self-inflation, she had to remind them both of Jerry's worst error in judgment—and most expensive—since the foundation of R-D, Inc.

Doheny moved toward the door, carrying his check. On the threshold, he paused and said, "I'll have Rhoda bank this if you don't need her for a moment." Then he added, "It may cover some of the expenses you've incurred with your friend Amos Willy."

For once, Jerry could think of nothing to say.

Amos Willy entered and sat down quietly in the blond-leather armchair facing Jerry at one side of his desk. Looking at him, Jerry knew, as always, that here was the utterly dedicated man. Dedication shone from his slightly myopic eyes, from the wild, unshorn disorder of his hair, from his frayed shirt-collar and well-worn tweeds, from the scuffed, unshined toes of his loafers. It was this dedication, this integrity, that had sold Jerry on Amos Willy from the first time that virtually unknown scientist had worked his way shyly through the office door. As he had told Park Doheny, "I may not know a damned thing about rhodomagnetics, but I pride myself on knowing a little about men. I'm backing Amos Willy all the way."

The word "*rhodomagnetics*!" had emerged as a snort from Roheny's scientifically solid nostrils. "They're still a hundred years away."

"Maybe," Jerry had replied. "But I'd like to be able to hang a picture to my wall without having to screw a hole in the plaster—and so would a few hundred million other people."

His partner had rolled his eyes toward heaven, thrown up his hands and walked out, muttering something about, "And *he* thinks *I'm* screwy!"

Amos Willy rested a suede-patched elbow on Jerry's desk and said. "This is just a progress report, Mr. Hale. I think you ought to know I've achieved a three milligram attraction between a gram of silicon and ten grams of fuller's earth."

"This is important?" Jerry asked, not unkindly.

"It's the first concrete success I've attained," said Amos Willy, his dedicated eyes ablaze. "It's proof I haven't been barking down the wrong well."

Jerry restrained an almost irresistible impulse to unscramble the metaphor and said, "That's wonderful, Amos. Any chance of giving me a demonstration? My partner seems to feel that you've essayed the impossible."

The scientist hesitated, looked his confusion, blushed, stammered, finally said, "You've trusted me, Mr. Hale, so it's only fair that I should trust you. I've been doing my best to keep my personal expenses low, since my experimental and research work have been so expensive. I..."

He hesitated, then said, "When can you come?"

"Right now, if it's okay with you," said Jerry, delighted at the chance of escaping, however briefly, the gloats of his partner and Rhoda Carlin.

Amos Willy hesitated again. "You may find it—well, not quite what you expect," he said.

Jerry came around the desk and laid a friendly hand on the scientist's back. "I may be a heel," he said. "At any rate, I've been called one by experts. But nobody ever called me a snob."

"And you won't tell a soul?" Amos Willy asked anxiously.

"Secrecy is part of the stock in trade of R-D, Inc.," Jerry assured him. "Without it, we'd be nowhere."

The scientist looked at Jerry doubtfully, then sighed and said, "Very well, come along then. But please don't go outdoors when we get there—you might be—er—noticed."

Jerry was still trying to figure that one out when they hit the street and flagged a taxi. To get to Willy's laboratory, wherever it was, meant he would be outside—as he was bound to be when he left it. So how could he not go

outside? He gave it up after a while and decided to let nature take its course.

While Amos Willy's laboratory was scarcely in a part of the city favored with frequent mention in the society gossip columns, it scarcely seemed a district where being noticed might cause difficulty. The cab pulled to a halt in front of what appeared to be an abandoned warehouse or loft building, one of many that lined the almost deserted street. Amos paid off the driver, who looked at the money suspiciously and said, "What kind of queer is this?"

Jerry stepped in and paid the fare himself—but not before noticing that the bill the driver had returned to the scientist was one of the large, old-fashioned currency notes that had been superseded by the more handy size in 1928. As Amos Willy unlocked a door at one end of the warehouse, he said, "Where did you get that bill, Amos? It looked almost new."

"It is new," said the scientist bafflingly. He led the way to what appeared to be a service elevator of ancient vintage, one that was operated by pulling on a cable of twisted wires. Before putting it in motion, he uncovered

what looked like a ship's capstan, off in a corner of the lift. "This is something I thought up to help save expenses," he said. "The economics are quite extraordinary."

Puzzled, Jerry peered over his shoulder, saw him check a knob that appeared to register a set of numbers that reminded him of the numbers on a dashboard speedometer. It was turned to 1-8-9-1. The scientist ignored the cable, but said, "And now—we press this." He pushed a button on the left of the capstan, there was a brief sense of movement. "We're in the basement," he added, as he opened the lift door.

It was a large, old-fashioned basement, with a smell of damp ashes familiar since Jerry's childhood. He wondered a little that such a basement should lie under a warehouse—it looked more appropriate to a plain house, with its radiating furnace pipes just under the ceiling.

He forgot about this as Amos Willy led him to a wooden door, which he opened. This, it appeared, was his laboratory, and he ran through a demonstration of his silicon-fuller's earth rhodomagnetic attraction that left Jerry unimpressed, since

he didn't really know much about the theory or practice of non-ferrous magnetism.

Then the inventor said, "Of course, my notes are all filed in my rooms upstairs. Would you mind coming up there? I'll scout around and make sure Mrs. Talbot and Dora are out of the way."

Puzzled, Jerry obeyed. He followed his client upstairs to the main floor, a hideous golden-oak, flowered-carpet and stained-glass monstrosity, then up two more flights. It was, he thought, certainly an old-fashioned house. Then, with the force of a lightning bolt, he recalled that they were in the warehouse.

It didn't make sense—nor did Amos Willy's two rooms on the third floor front. Jerry turned shuddering eyes away from a birchbark chromo inscribed, *God love our happy home*, then from a picture of some large antlered animal standing defiantly over the dying body of its mate. Ignoring his host, he went to the window and looked out.

They weren't even in the same part of the city—they weren't in the same era unless Jerry had gone mad. He saw a stout gentleman pass slowly along the sidewalk on the other side of the street, wearing a high-crowned

derby with an absurdly rolled brim and a watch chain thick as a hawser across his brocaded waistcoat. He noted a pair of ladies in long skirts and—he gulped—bustles. He saw a boy in a Buster Brown suit roll a hoop slowly down the street in the opposite direction from an open victoria driven by a top-hatted coachman and inhabited by an elegant lady who lolled beneath a fringed parasol.

Only faintly did he hear Amos Willy repeat his name to get his attention. Turning on the inventor, he blazed, "Damn rhodomagnetics now, Amos! Is this a joke, or have you invented some sort of time-travel machine?"

The scientist looked mildly distressed. "It's not exactly a matter of time travel," he said. "The theory is simple enough once you understand it. I put the thing together to save money."

"You did *what*?" Jerry discovered he was shouting.

"Well . . ." His vehemence had flustered the inventor. "You see, I knew I was costing you a lot of money, and what with the cost of living up so, it seemed economical to work this out. It cost very little, and the savings are enormous. My rooms only cost three dollars a week, and



that includes breakfast. I can live like a king on less than fifty dollars a month. Look"—he turned toward the files that filled one wall of his parlor-study—"I have them all itemized."

Jerry said, "Oh, my God!" and collapsed upon an elaborate chair of black walnut that looked as if it had been upholstered with horsehair—and that felt like horsehair when he sat on it. He said, to a distressed and bewildered Amos Willy, "What time—I mean, what date is it here?"

"Let me think," said the scientist. "Why, it's June, 1891. I'm not sure of the exact date. And I'm not sure it's really a time-travel machine. You see—"

"Skip it," said Jerry rudely. "I wouldn't understand it anyway. But, man, don't you realize what you've done? Don't answer that—you evidently don't. Can you get us back where we belong?"

"Of course," said Amos, moving toward the door. "I hope you won't spread our little secret."

"Don't worry," said Jerry. "Who'd believe me if I tried?" It was incredible, he thought as he followed Amos down the carpeted stairs. The man who had discovered time

travel had used it to save money, not to make it. On the return trip, which was accomplished without incident, he paid close attention to the capstan. "And that's all there is to it?" he asked when they were back.

"That's all there is to it," the scientist repeated. "It's really a very simple process, once the quantum mathematical theory behind it is understood. I got the idea one morning in the bathtub."

"You've shown me a miracle," said Jerry solemnly. "And you can vary the date of arrival by turning that doodad?"

"I suppose so," said Amos. "I've never tried any other date. Why should I when I'm so well off where I am?"

"No reason at all," said Jerry. They left the warehouse and walked toward the nearest avenue to pick up a cab. "I'm not sure this life you're leading is healthy," he told the scientist. "After all, *this* is the time you were born into. Surely, you have some interests here beyond your science—friends, a girl." He saw by Amos' blush that he had scored and put on the pitch. Amos had earned relaxation, a refresher, a vacation, a party. Jerry would take care of the precious in-

ventions and experiments and see no harm came to them. By the time they parted, Amos had his check for five hundred dollars and Jerry had the keys to the warehouse service elevator and the lodging house back in time. "I'll take good care of them. Don't worry about a thing. Go out and have yourself a ball," he said as they parted.

"A ball?" said Amos. "What sort of a ball?"

Hurrying away, Jerry told himself, "You'll never know, sport."

It was not that Jerry had anything really nefarious in mind—at any rate, where the dedicated Amos Willy was concerned. He merely wanted to get back there, to 1891, and look around. After all, it was opportunity—fantastic opportunity—and Jerry was hardly the man to let its knock go unanswered. That night he lay awake in his Sutton Place bedroom, thinking, figuring, computing. For once, R-D, Inc., and its myriad problems were pushed into the hind-quarters of his mind.

The next morning, he called the office and told Rhoda to cancel his appointments until further notice. He was going to have to move—and

move fast. There was no telling when the dedicated Amos might come wandering back from his hastily induced holiday.

Jerry spent the entire morning at the Public Library, delving into old almanacs and sports record books. Then he went downtown to the second-hand bookstore district and purchased a half-dozen books, dealing with horse-racing history, with baseball, with the operations of the stock-market, with general life in the early 1890's. By the time he was finished, it was past three o'clock and the banks were closed, so he returned to the office.

"Where have you been?" Rhoda asked him as he entered. "You must have gotten a million calls."

"How about Mr. Willy—did he call?" he asked, trying to hide from her the wholly masculine urge that all but overwhelmed him at sight of her shoulders, throat and upper bosom, revealed by a backless summer dress.

"No—that screwball's the only one who didn't," she told him. Then, after eyeing him curiously, "You sure you're all right, Jerry?"

"Huh? Who me? I'm fine,"

he told her. He went in to his desk and tended to office affairs, though his heart was not in it. Twice, he almost told Park Doheny about Amos Willy's amazing discovery, but each time he managed to hold his tongue. Park would not believe him, and he had promised Amos to keep his secret secret. Every time he thought of it, Jerry could only wonder at a man so dedicated that he had invented a time machine simply to cut down living expenses while working out his theories on rhodomagnetics.

He was going to have to make his move the next day, so he was in and out of the office, completing his preparations. A theatrical costumer supplied him with a Gay Nineties outfit—complete from straw boater with elastic to suede-topped high-button shoes. He found it impossible to get paper money, so he invested in a hundred silver dollars, dated before 1890, and, for fabulous prices, managed to pick up another five hundred in properly dated twenty-dollar gold pieces. By the time he had all this assembled at the office, it was after five. Gathering his impedimenta, he bade Rhoda Carlin a polite farewell, rode down in the elevator and

hired a cab to take him to the warehouse.

When he got out, another cab pulled up behind his and Rhoda emerged, revealing a breath-taking expanse of nylon leg. Wishing the silver dollars weren't quite so heavy, and that the box containing his costume weren't quite so awkward and bulky, Jerry waited until she came up to him. "What's the idea?" he asked her.

"You left these at the office—I thought you might need them," said the girl. She handed him, without expression, the precious box that contained his gold pieces. Feeling slightly sick to his stomach over danger averted, Jerry thanked her. Regarding him curiously, she said, "Have you gone stark, staring nuts—or what?"

"What difference does it make to you?" he asked her.

She regarded him gravely, then told him, "No girl likes to lose half a meal-ticket—even the treacherous, unreliable half."

"Treacherous—unreliable?" He was wounded to the quick.

"You're just like my old man," she said. "Mother never trusted him out of her sight." Then, looking curiously at their surroundings, "What

are you doing in this crummy neighborhood?"

"Your friend, Amos Willy, has his laboratory inside," said Jerry. An impulse, fortified by two years of longing frustration, was taking shape in his mind.

"What are you taking him beside gold?" Rhoda asked. "Birdseed?"

"Come along and find out," he told her, unlocking the door. He stood aside, holding his breath, while she hesitated.

Finally, with slightly wrinkled nose, she said, "I don't know which of us is crazier," and walked briskly inside. She looked around the service elevator with contempt while Jerry busied himself with the capstan, checking the numbers on the dial and praying that he was not doing anything wrong. Unquestionably, he decided, he must be out of his mind to take the girl with him. "But if this be insanity, then I be a happy lunatic," he told himself.

He looked up and around, just to make certain Rhoda was still with him, then gave a shout of alarm. She had her hands on the cable, seemed just about to give it a pull. "No! Don't!" he shouted, leaping for her. As he did so, the knob from the side of the

capstan came away in his hand.

There was a lurch, a sickening, sideways movement, then an ominous, grinding crunch of metal. Jerry said, "Oh, my God!" and looked down to discover Rhoda's well-advertised charms pressed close against him, her large violet eyes looking up, frightened, into his.

"What happened?" she asked. "What did I do?" Realizing where she was, she disengaged herself from him as if he had been a piece of chewing gum stuck to her shoe.

"I don't know—yet," he told her. Taking a deep breath, he opened the lift door—and felt a flood of relief at sight of the now-familiar old-fashioned cellar. "It's okay," he said. "Let's go quickly, don't linger."

They managed to sneak upstairs unobserved, although wheezy music from an old-fashioned upright foot-powered organ sounded from the parlor on the main floor, playing *Bringing in the Sheaves*. Not until they were safely in Amos Willy's rooms, did Jerry allow Rhoda to speak. Then she said, "It must be me that's crazy." She looked out the window, gave a little scream of alarm and

said, "What is this—a movie set?"

Apparently, her scream was heard, for rapid footsteps were followed by a rapping on the door. "Mr. Willy! I'm surprised at you," said a sharp, feminine voice. "You know my rules about young ladies in the upstairs rooms."

"Mrs. Talbot?" Jerry turned on all the ingratiation he could muster. "This is Mr. Hale, Amos Willy's employer. He's going to be away a few days, and he offered his rooms to my bride and myself for a—" he looked at Rhoda helplessly—"for a honeymoon."

"Oh!" There was a blend of disapproval and romantic curiosity in the single syllable. Then, "Very well, I suppose it's all right, but I'll have to double the rates."

"I shall be down directly to settle the matter, I hope to your satisfaction," said Jerry, feeling as if he were Alice, falling slowly down the White Rabbit's hole. He waited until Mrs. Talbot's footsteps on the stairs could no longer be heard, then said, "This isn't a movie set, Rhoda. This is the real thing."

She was regarding him speculatively. "Mrs. Jerry Hale," she said dreamily.

He grabbed her by the shoulders. "Rhoda! Snap out of it! We busted Amos Willy's time machine getting here. I don't know how to get us back. We're trapped."

Her face was close to his. She said, "Shut up and kiss me."

He did so—and again time performed a dizzy parabola. However, he pulled himself out of it in time to go into the bedroom and don the clothes he had purchased from the costumer, remembering to part his hair in the middle. Rhoda looked at him disbelievingly. "Jerry, dear," she said, "hasn't this silly joke gone on far enough?"

"It's no joke," he told her. He had been wondering if he hadn't made a ghastly mistake in telling Mrs. Talbot Rhoda was his wife. After all . . . However, looking at that lush, lovely face and figure, he felt his heart indulge in some odd but not unpleasant thumps. He had wanted this girl for two years. Now, she couldn't leave the rooms if she wanted to—not without causing a riot in her 1956 clothes. An old phrase floated through his mind . . . "Once aboard the lugger, and the girl is mine." He was humming a little tune as he went downstairs to see Mrs. Tal-

bot, carefully wiping off the stains of Rhoda's lipstick around his mouth.

Mrs. Talbot proved charming, once she saw a ten-dollar gold piece, and even agreed to bring them a little supper. Jerry continued to hum as he ran up the stairs. "Once aboard the lugger . . ."

The supper proved to be incredibly ample and extremely good—but Jerry spent the night on the horse-hair sofa, while Rhoda slept peacefully on the bed in the next room. She had killed his ideas in exactly two syllables—"No soap!"

The following afternoon, with Rhoda wearing an ill-fitting ready-made dress that Jerry had managed to purchase for her at a large department store, they were married at the city registry—an absurdly quaint, gaslit structure of red-brick that, in their own time, had long since been replaced by a towering municipal skyscraper.

Rhoda went through the ceremony gravely. Not until they were ensconced in a hansom cab, with the horse trotting noisily over a cobbled pavement, did she say, "I'd almost given up here." Snuggling close to him, she murmured, "Jerry, I'm so happy."

"I'm a little stunned," said

Jerry, slipping an arm about familiar shoulders covered with unfamiliar ruffles. "Why did you give me the brush for so long, honey?"

"Because," she told him, "you didn't have marriage in mind."

The following day, they moved from Mrs. Talbot's house to a large hotel. For fifteen dollars a week, Jerry rented the bridal suite, complete with its gray marble private bathroom. Rhoda spent the next few days shopping, while Jerry moved about the city, making the connections he wanted. It was not as simple as he had expected, but he was not a man to be denied. On the fourth day, they took a chugging steam train that conveyed them, along with a mixed crowd in holiday mood, to an ornate racetrack on the outskirts of town.

"Who's that man—the one who nodded to you?" Rhoda asked curiously as they took their places in a grandstand box close to the finish line. "The one with the handlebar mustache."

"Oh—" said Jerry. "That's Mr. Watson, Mr. Phil Watson from Philadelphia. We have a little wager on the fifth race—the Vanderlip Silver

Cup. He believes a horse called Shoo-in is going to win." Jerry found he was beginning to like Rhoda, even without lipstick. But then, he told himself, he would have liked her tattooed blue.

"And Shoo-in isn't going to win?" she asked him quaintly.

He patted the little book in his pocket. "Not unless history is wrong," he replied confidently.

He bet mildly, disinterestedly, on the first four races, since he had no record of them, managed to do a little better than break even. He placed another bet, with a bookmaker, on Breakaway, the long-odds filly scheduled to take the big race. He and Rhoda were on their feet, yelling their heads off, when Breakaway caught Shoo-in in the home stretch and won, going away, by half a length.

"We won! You did it!" Rhoda shouted in his ear, her arms around his neck. Then, restraining herself. "How much?"

"About eleven thousand," he told her proudly.

"Wonderful!" she replied. "Then I can buy that Worth copy at Mr. Wanamaker's tomorrow."

"You can buy the original," he told her grandly, biting off the end of a Corona Corona.

*Women!* he thought. *Bless 'em!*

A few minutes later, Mr. Philip Watson from Philadelphia entered the box, shook hands with Rhoda and pulled a number of orange-backed gold certificates from an exceedingly plump wallet. "I don't know how you called that one, Hale," he told Jerry. "But you earned this." He put the money into Jerry's waiting hands, then added with a speculative gleam in his little eyes. "The Diamond Tray comes up next week—how about giving me a chance to win some of it back?"

"Who do you like?" Jerry asked him.

Mr. Watson hesitated, then shrugged and said, "I've got a gelding going for me that should be about ready, a colt I picked up at the Louisville auction last year. Of course, she's a slow starter, and mighty green, but I feel I ought to back her—purely out of sentiment, of course."

Jerry laughed and said, "Sentiment, my eye! What's his name?"

"Carryall," said Mr. Phil Watson.

"Just a moment," said Jerry. Turning away, he got out the record book in his pocket, shielding it carefully from prying eyes. He found

the Diamond Tray Stakes, checked 1891. The winner, unless history lied again, was a nag called *Footless*. He put away the little book and turned to close the deal. Mr. Watson sighed and turned away.

"Such a sad little man," said Rhoda with sympathy—to Jerry's amazement, she actually had sympathy now that he had finally come to know her in a biblical, as well as in a professional, sense.

"He's only worth about five million bucks," Jerry told her, unfeelingly. "Made it in cod liver oil."

"Such a sad little millionaire then," said his wife. Then, wriggling uncomfortably, "Take me home, honey. These damned stays are cutting me in two."

He didn't see much of Rhoda while the sun was up the next week. His affairs kept him busy during the day—there were so many people to meet, so many things to do, so many places to go—but she didn't seem discontented. They dined in state, visited the theaters, had happy nights of love. To his surprise, when Diamond Tray Stakes day came around, Rhoda pleaded a headache and refused to go with him.

That was the day the blow

fell. Footless was running well in front of the field as they rounded the home turn, but then the horse skidded and actually fell down, throwing its jockey almost to the outer rail. While Jerry looked on in disbelief and mounting horror, the rest of the field swept past his choice and came home, with Carryall nicely in front.

"I'll have to get the balance from the bank tomorrow," said Jerry, handing over the contents of his wallet—a little matter of ten thousand dollars, which was only half the amount of the bet.

Philip Watson's little eyes were like twin diamond bits boring into him. Jerry didn't think he had ever seen anything quite so hard. The sportsman said in tones made all the more menacing because they were gentler by far than his normal speech, "Have the money at my office before noon, or you may find matters a trifle unpleasant." Before turning away, he added, "Please convey my regards to your beautiful lady."

"By all means," said Jerry, in a fog of bewilderment laced with fear. This was disaster in more ways than one—for very evidently either history did lie or he and Rhoda were not in the past of



the same world into which they had been born. Riding back to the city, Jerry tried desperately to figure it out. He wished he had listened more attentively to what Amos Willy had tried to tell him about the machine. Something about its not being exactly a time-travel instrument . . .

Jerry knew the theory of parallel time-tracks, although, until this moment, he had never before given it much attention. It involved—but to hell with theory. Fantastic or not, he was stuck with hard fact, caught in a past whose future he could not predict. Worse, there was no way out. He still had about twelve hundred in the bank—hardly enough to satisfy Phil Watson, but enough to take Rhoda and himself out of the city and give them a stake in this world where a dollar went such a long way.

Somehow, memory of Watson's diamond-drill eyes told him that wouldn't work. And, if the dollar in this world went a long way, it was also correspondingly difficult to make. Five thousand dollars a year meant prosperity—but, to earn it, a man had to put in six long days of labor. If he could find a job that paid that much . . .

He wondered what Phil Watson had meant by the ominous words, "a trifle unpleasant"—and decided he didn't want to stick around and find out. The hotel would cash a check for him, and he and Rhoda could be off that night. He thought longingly of the security of his blond-mahogany desk back at R-D, Inc., somewhere in time, on some other world, and cursed Amos Willy and all his works. Then he began to wonder how Rhoda was going to take the bad news.

She was waiting for him in the lobby of the hotel when he got there, and she already knew some of it. She said, "I know you lost your shirt, Jerry." She sounded a little like the Rhoda of old—the fearsome Rhoda of the outer office.

"Not so loud!" he muttered furtively. "I don't want it to get around here."

"It's already around," she told him. "When Philadelphia Phil—yes, that's what they call your 'nice' Mr. Watson—When Philadelphia Phil makes a killing, everybody knows about it."

"Philadelphia Phil?" Somewhere, in Jerry's memory, a gong reverberated. Philadelphia Phil—why, that would be this world's version of

Pittsburgh Phil, the most famous and ruthless big-time race-track winner of his own and Rhoda's world. He sank onto a settee and mopped his brow with a handkerchief.

Rhoda stood over him. "Well, Jerry, what are you going to do?" she asked quietly. "You know you haven't the money to pay him."

He took her hands in his, like a drowning man clutching twin life-preservers, said in a low voice, "We're going to cash a check and get out of here—tonight."

"Are we?" she asked. "I don't think so," She nodded toward a couple of extremely sporty looking, and extremely tough looking, characters, who were lounging close to the entrance to the men's bar, their gimlet eyes fixed on him. "These gentlemen have been waiting for your arrival. I overheard them talking to the clerk."

"Oh, my God!" gasped Jerry. "What *am* I going to do? I'm sorry I got you into this, honey—only I'm not sorry about us."

"You mean that, Jerry?" Her voice, briefly, was tender.

"I mean it," he told her.

"Then this is what we're going to do," she told him firmly. "We're going to pay

Mr. Watson tonight in full."

"With what?" he asked her, astonished.

"With this." She plunged a hand into her reticule and pulled from it a thick roll of bills. "Then you're going to work—for me."

"I don't understand," he told her. "How . . . ?"

She said, "While you've been wasting your time and money trying to make a dishonest killing, I've been busy trying to do the women of this world a little good—and make an honest profit."

"But with what?" he asked her, still unable to credit his senses. "How can you do women some good?"

She wriggled uncomfortably and said, "I'm getting them out of these horrible stays. I've been going out of my mind in them. So I took my panty girdle to a manufacturer and made a deal. The patent is already applied for, and I'm going into business—only you, are going into it with me and see that our interest is protected."

He looked at her with awe. "You mean . . .," he began.

"I mean," she said firmly, "that from now on there will be no more betting—except maybe a little, for fun. It's going to take all I got today—ten thousand—to pull you

out of this hole. That will leave us a little to keep going on. The rest is up to you."

"You doll!" he said fervently. "You violet-eyed wonder!" He moved to embrace her, right there in the lobby.

"No more bets?" she managed before his lips sealed hers.

"No more bets," he whispered.

The sound of a throat-clearing behind him, brought him out of his rapture. He turned, to see a bedraggled-looking Amos Willy standing there, Amos said, "Mr. Hale—Miss Carlin—thank God, I've found you. Mr. Doheny is going out of his mind."

"It will never miss him," said Rhoda. "And the name is not Miss Carlin—it's Mrs. Hale." Then, "Mr. Willy! How did you ever . . . ?"

"It wasn't easy," was the reply. "I had to take the whole machine to pieces and put it together again. What did you do to it, Mr. Hale? It was all warped."

"Never mind," said Jerry. "You did it."

"We should be getting back," said Amos. "It's taken me several days to find you here, and Mr. Doheny is really worried."

The nightmare was over.

Jerry felt as if the weight of the ages had been lifted from his shoulders. He said, "I'm sorry about the machine, Amos, but, since you've fixed it." He turned toward Rhoda, added, "Come on, honey. Let's go."

"We're not going back." The words were low-pitched but unmistakably firm. "We have our roots down here."

"Not going back?" Jerry was incredulous. "But, honey, we don't belong here—not really. In our own time, in our own world—"

"In our own time, in our own world, I'm Miss Carlin, not Mrs. Hale. I'm a stenographer, not a capitalist, a—babe, not a lady. Besides, you promised . . ."

"That's right," said Jerry. "I did." He looked at his wife for a long moment, then turned to Amos Willy and said, "Sorry, chum, you heard what the lady said."

"But what will I tell Mr. Doheny?" the inventor asked helplessly, his myopic, dedicated eyes ablink.

"Tell Mr. Doheny," said Rhoda, "to find himself a new partner—and a new secretary." She smiled at Jerry and said, "Shall we have dinner now, darling?"

THE END

## THE REVOLVING FAN



ETHERLINE. Nos. 66, 67, 68. AFPA, 6 Bramerton Rd., Caulfield, S.E. 8, Victoria, Australia. U.S. Agent: John Hitchcock, 15 Arbutus St., Baltimore 28, Md. 13/\$1. 26 pp.

ETHERLINE must be as valuable to Australian s-f fans as FANTASY-TIMES (see below) is to those of the U.S. The three issues reviewed here are filled with factual material (except, of course, for those press agent fantasies dreamt up by fJAckerman); especially noteworthy is ETHER's checklist of individual authors. In these three issues, Murray Leinster, Dr. E. E. Smith, and Algis Budrys are covered, with lists of their short stories, magazine appearances, books, dates of initial appearance, pseudonyms, and collaborations. For this department alone, ETHER is well worth its less-than-a-dime per copy price. Other departments include reports on s-f fan groups in Brisbane, Canberra, and Melbourne; reviews of books and magazines; coverage of global news reports likely to interest *aficionados*; and thumbnail sketches of fanzines. Brisk, businesslike, here's a good dollar's worth indeed.

\* \* \*

FANTASY TIMES. Nos. 240-247. Fandom House, P.O. Box #2331, Paterson 23, New Jersey. 10¢; 12/\$1. 6-8 pp.

F-T is, of course, the old standby of the serious fan, and every issue is sure to be read from cover to cover. Representative highlights:

Alex Samelman, last editor of Standard Magazines' s-f group, dies at age 51.

Mrs. Nat Schachner appeals for copies of her late husband's stories.

ENIGMAS, new Mexican s-f magazine, appears in Mexico City.

Thomas S. Gardiner reviews 1955 in science fiction.

Howard Brown's Intro to the 30th Anniversary issue of *Amazing*.

Reports by editors and staff on 1955 in science fiction all over the world.

This should give you some idea of what F-T does for the field. I can't say I agree with all the editors' ideas, but I respect their intent. Get this one first.

\* \* \*

YANDRO, No. 38. Robert and Juanita Coulson, 407 1/2 East 6th St., North Manchester, Indiana. 12/50¢; 21 pp.

This successor to EISFA, as its editors candidly admit, is "a low-pressure fanzine put out for the enjoyment of the editors and anyone else who enjoys this sort of thing." That about sets the tone for the issue. Unassuming, modest, the 'zine performs its function for the Eastern Indiana Science Fiction Association, but brings assorted tid-bits for the uncommitted reader. Among them: a thud-and-blunder serial by Hal Annas, "Because of the Tulux"; a British report by Alan Dodd; Alan James' movie review of "Time Slip" (this is one movie of which I've never heard mention); a very amateurish short-short, "Too Late to Turn Back," by Dan Lesco; Tom Stratton's ironic review of "It Came From Beneath the Sea—Dammit"; and the usual letters column.

\* \* \*

FRONTIER, No. 6. Dale R. Smith, 3001 Kyle Ave., Minneapolis 22, Minnesota. 6/\$3, 21 pp.

With its beautiful cover, this issue demonstrates that the publication, like its parent Society for the Advancement of Space Travel, is maturing. Thomas E. Purdom starts off the contents with a discussion of "Space Travel and the Individual" which well merits reading. Wayne Proell gives a report

on the history of the Chicago Rocket Society, followed by the magazine's World Roster of Rocket, Interplanetary, and Astronautical Societies. In "Interplanetary Communication and Christian Theology," Carl H. Olson, Minister of Minneapolis' First Universalist Church, investigates the probable effect of extraterrestrial life on religious thinking and Christian theology. "Space Travel for the Masses" is an unflattering review of a paperbound book, "The Key to Interplanetary Space Travel." Other items by Walter R. Rose and Terry Jeeves close the issue.

\* \* \*

PRODIGENIUS. No. 1. *Kenneth Jackman, 900 S. Main, Payson, Utah. 25¢ (with added enclosure). 22 pp.*

Kenneth Jackman is a youngster who is interested in becoming a B.N.F. (big name fan). This, his first effort, will scarcely help him to his goal. Inchoate, vacillating between such fillers as mathematical puzzles and verse, to self-conscious humor, it is too much for this elderly (I'm over thirty) reviewer. If you're under 20, as I surmise Mr. Jackman is, you may find it interesting; I couldn't. Oh, yes . . . the editor offers to send a Haldermann-Julius booklet, Maynard Shipley's "Are the Planets Inhabited?" with each copy of PRODIGENIUS ordered.

\* \* \*

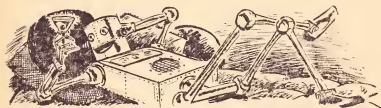
CRY OF THE NAMELESS. No. 89. *Box 92, 920 Third Ave., Seattle 4, Washington. 10¢; 21/\$1. 20 pp.*

One of the better issues of this breezy 'zine, Number 89 starts off with Renfrew Pemberton's views and reviews of science fiction magazines in "Science Fiction Plowed Under." It shows an excellent sense of values, a nice choice of words, and a barbed wit. Following, a composite report on all stories in all s-f magazines covered. Burnett R. Toskey looks back to the year 1931 and *Amazing Stories* with nostalgia; Amelia Pemberton shows, as she deals with fanzines, that all the sense and nonsense is not limited to her worthy spouse; Otto Pfeifer's "One BEM's Opinion" is another "this is what's wrong with fandom" item. A letters column closes what is one of the better issues of CRY in some time.

# The Idiot

By PAUL V. DALLAS

AN AMAZING FEATURETTE



THE picture-taking was over now, and the questioning began. "Professor," one of the reporters asked, "is it true that this machine will be the greatest friend man ever had?"

"Exactly," answered the scientist, coughing modestly.

"How does it work?" asked another one. "What will it do?" asked one from up front.

"It would be easier to tell you what it won't do," Professor Wilson answered, smiling at his quick wit. "It is a Friend. Just that. Science has given the world many things, but ten thousand years of continuous science have culminated in this highly complicated mechanism. The first Machine Friend."

"Can you give us details?"

"Well, it is fully adjustable so that it can be made to look

just as you would want your best friend to look. It can be pre-set to do anything you want it to and not do anything you don't want it to do. It is built on the liking principle, so that it will like you regardless of your faults, and yet have none of its own. It can make coffee, lend money. And it drives its own car. That's it in a nutshell."

"It sure sounds like a real friend," said one of the younger reporters, "but what about the contest? Why was it cancelled?"

"The contest was cancelled," said the scientist sternly, "because nobody who wrote in was able to convince me in twenty-five words or less that he or she was able to appreciate a real Friend. I am therefore going to pick a name out of the phone book

—at random—and present the Machine Friend to him or her. I trust you will all be at the presentation.”

A quick search of the office revealed a phone book under the desk. This was held behind the scientist's back. He inserted a short finger into it. The book was opened. The finger rested on the name James Haeffledonger. . . .

The appropriate ceremonies were held and the presentation made, even though it turned out that James Haeffledonger's phone had been disconnected for nonpayment. James lived alone. He was poor. He needed a friend, so everyone was pleased.

The trouble occurred a week later, when a large pile of radio tubes and wire were found in Haeffledonger's garbage can. Investigations were made and it was discovered that this debris had once been the innards of the Machine Friend.

The Presentation Committee reconvened and called, en masse, at the shabby home of James Haeffledonger. They forced their way in and found the eviscerated machine

perched on the sofa with a cup of coffee in front of it. James sat across the way, sipping his own coffee.

“It's impossible!” shouted Professor Wilson, pushing his way to the front of the crowd. “The machine could not have made coffee without its radio tubes and wires and uranium!”

“It didn't make the coffee,” Haeffledonger said shyly, “I did.”

“You addle-brained imbecile!” screamed the scientist. “You dolt! You loafer! I shall prefer charges! How can you expect the Machine Friend to do anything for you when you have removed its works?” The little man actually jumped up and down in his rage.

Haeffledonger looked bewildered in his stupid way. “But I didn't want it to *do* anything. I want to do things for *it*. I don't ask anything of it.”

“The man's a complete idiot!” Professor Wilson shouted.

So they took the machine away from James Haeffledonger and gave it to someone else—someone who knew how to use a friend intelligently.

THE END





You will find listed here, the names of thirty pen-friends who are waiting to hear from you. In the months to come there will be many more and we hope that your name will be among them. Thus, *The Space Club* will be a medium whereby science fiction enthusiasts all over the world can meet by mail. Lasting friendships will be formed, viewpoints exchanged, experiences shared. We hope that science fiction clubs everywhere will watch and use *The Space Club* as a means of finding fans and new members in their own areas as well as a meeting place where new friends will be limited only by the time you are able to allot to correspondence.

As a general rule, correspondents meeting in *The Space Club* will have a common interest—science fiction. But they will of course have other interests also. Some are noted; others will be revealed through correspondence.

If you are interested in finding even more friends through correspondence, we suggest you pick up a copy of Ziff-Davis' brand new magazine—PEN PALS. The first issue is now on the stands. It lists the names of fifteen hundred pen pals from twelve years of age to eight-eight, with interests ranging from match-cover collecting to tape recording and spelunking. In fact, this first issue is well worth the money for its features alone. Martin Block, America's leading disc jockey tells of the letters he has received. Other glamorous names and many sparkling features make PEN PALS completely unique.

Incidentally, if you want your name to appear in *The Space Club*, write and say so. If you are under 18 we'll need the signature of your parents or guardian. So here's to happy correspondence!

JAMES W. AYERS, 609 FIRST ST., ATTALIA, ALA. . . . James would like to correspond with fellow s-f fans.

FRANKLIN BERGQUIST, GENERAL DELIVERY, EDDYVILLE, IOWA . . . 16 years, junior in high school, Franklin has small collection of s-f material. He plays chess, is an amateur chemist. Wants to start s-f club in the middle states.

RICHARD BROWN, 127 ROBERTS ST., PASADENA 3, CALIF. . . . Though just 14 years old, Richard considers himself a seasoned veteran in the s-f field. He has quite a collection of mags. His goal is to find other people in his vicinity who like to read and write both s-f and fantasy.

BETTY ANN COMPTON, 2744 WAVERLY DRIVE, GARY, INDIANA . . . Betty is 18 years old, 5'5", green eyes, reddish brown hair. She became interested in s-f by accident when a cousin happened to leave a book at her house. Since then she has enjoyed it regularly.

MICHAEL DECKINGER, 85 LOCUST AVE., MILLBURN, N. J. . . . In the 9th grade, Michael has a large collection of s-f mags., p.b.s., and pulps totaling about 475. Anxious to hear from other fans.

CHARLES GLENBERG, 19071 TYRONNE AVE., EUCLID 19, OHIO . . . 13 years old, Charles was enticed to *Amazing Stories* via the Anniversary Issue.



JERRY FINE, 1549 WILLOW ST., DENVER, COLO. . . . 13-year-old Jerry, has a small, growing science-fiction library.

BILL VAN FOSSAN, 1508 2nd ST., NEW BRIGHTON, PA. . . . Bill is interested in any sort of science fiction. He is 16 years old and works at a supermarket.

BARRY HAWK, 925 McKNIGHT ST., READING, PA. . . . 16 years of age, Barry's interests are s-f, space theories, rocketry, many types of music, especially jazz, sports.

MARIJANE JOHNSON, 1011 E. HOFFMAN, SPOKANE 22, WASH. . . . Marijane would like to get together with other fans through letters. *Amazing* is a monthly must for her.

ROBERT JENSEN, 7846 15th AVE., KENOSHA, WISC. . . . Bob's interests are stamp collecting, golf, baseball and cards. He is 16 years old.

DAVE KIRKWOOD, 419 11th AVENUE NORTHEAST, ROCHESTER, MINN. . . . 15 years old, Dave works after school as a paper boy. His interests are astronomy, hi-fi. He's trying to rig a telescope so that he will be able to see Mars at its opposition to the Earth in Sept.

ROY RASMUSSEN, 3420 5th AVE., SO., MINNEAPOLIS, MINN. . . . Roy's hobbies are radio, electronics, television. He's 17.

DENIS LATKOWSKI, 4390 E. OUTER DRIVE, DETROIT 34, MICH. . . . 15 years old, Denis enjoys all water sports. He's best at swimming. Favorite s-f authors are: Arthur C. Clarke, C. M. Kornbluth, Robert Heinlein.

JOE MASON, 92 SOUTH HIGH ST., BRIDGTON, MAINE . . . 18-year-old junior at Bridgton High. Joe is very interested in sports.

ARLENE M. MALZAHN, 2987 SPRINGLE AVE., DETROIT 15, MICH. . . . 21 years old, Arlene works with mimeograph, addressograph, graphote. She enjoys all sorts of amazing things.

BILLY MEYERS, 4301 SHAWNEE CIRCLE, CHATTANOOGA 11, TENN. . . . Billy is 14. He has a large collection of s-f and fantasy, and wishes to have correspondents. Though his library is quite extensive already, he is willing to buy all of what he doesn't have and has a few items for sale or trade.

FRANK H. NEWTON, 891 WEST FIFTH PLACE, BIRMINGHAM 4, ALA. . . . 16 years old and an enthusiastic reader of science fiction.

JOAN PANGLE, ROUTE 1, MIDDLETOWN, VA. . . . 16-year-old Joan lives in the heart of the Shenandoah Valley. An avid s-f fan she is a member of the s-f book club. Looks forward to hearing from *Amazing* readers.

DANIEL PITTINSKY, 527 HINSDALE ST., BROOKLYN 7, N. Y. . . . Daniel is 13 years old and likes science fiction immensely.

RONALD PLUMB, 31 LIBERTY TERRACE, BUFFALO 15, N. Y. . . . Clerical worker, aged 21. Science fiction is Ronald's number one hobby. Favorite type is time travel.

FRANK W. RIDLEY, III, 3719 TUXEDO RD., N.W., ATLANTA, GA. . . . 17-year-old high school senior Frank is interested in pure and applied science and s-f. Hobbies are hunting, fishing, mechanics.

MRS. VIRGINIA B. SCHAEFER, 5546 MIDWOOD AVE., BALTIMORE 12, MD. . . . A housewife, Virginia has been reading s-f for 12 years. She thinks it's about time to establish some contacts with other fans. Her interests include reading, decoration, toy trains.

LARRY SOKOL, 4131 LAFAYETTE AVENUE, OMAHA 3, NEBR. . . . 15 years old, Larry is interested in fanzines, photography, particularly motion pictures.

LARRY STEINER, 1578 EAST 38th ST., OAKLAND 2, CALIF. . . . 13 years old, Larry likes to play football, swim and read. After school he has a paper route and mows lawns.

JOHN W. THIEL, 14901 HAMLIN AVE., MIDLOTHIAN, ILL. . . . John edits a fanzine and is an enthusiastic member of a few s-f clubs. He is 12 years old.

RICHARD M. WESOLIK, BOX 711, MENARD, ILL. . . . 31-year-old clerk-recorder, Richard has been reading s-f since 1941. He is anxious to correspond with other "dyed-in-the-wool" s-f fans.

CARLIN WOOLF, P.O. BOX 22, PIEDMONT, ALA. . . . 16 years old, Carlin would like to correspond with s-f fans, especially those who collect back issues of *Amazing*. He has a small collection which he intends to add to in the future.

HENRY CARTER, JR., 20015 MONTE VISTA, DETROIT 21, MICH. . . . 36 years old, interested in flying saucers, extra-sensory perception, other unusual occurrences. Would like to learn of the experiences and interests of other fans.

# THE RIVALS

By ROBERT SILVERBERG

*What about this do-it-yourself craze? It's caught on like crazy. You can build your own house, fix your own car, tat your own doilies, and psychoanalyze your wife. But all good things must finish, and this is Mr. Silverberg's idea of the complete and final end!*

MICHAEL KARREN held the solido slide slightly to one side, tipped it up and down to see which was the proper way of inserting it, and slid it into the projector. Instantly the image of his wife Helen and their two young sons took form at the end of his living room, glowing and life-like in three dimensions. He could almost smell once again the sharp sea tang that had been in the air, and as he looked at the solido image he found himself recapturing every pleasant moment of that glorious vacation.

Phil Jennerton stared at the image for a moment, nodded his appreciation, and strode heavily over to examine Karren's projector.

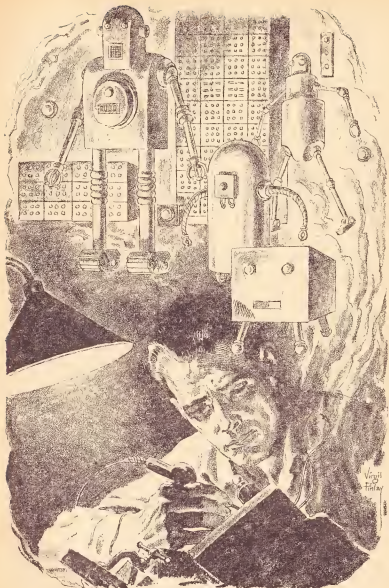
"You bought this," Jennerton said accusingly.

"Four hundred credits," said Karren.

"You're very proud of this," Jennerton said. "You think the mere ownership of a fancy solido-projector is an occasion for pride!"

Puzzled and alarmed by the big man's tone, Karren turned to look at him. Ever since the Karrens had moved here he had distrusted Jennerton, who lived next door. There was something too confident, too superior about Jennerton that had caused Karren, a mild, quiet young advertising executive, to dislike him from the start. But their wives had become friendly, and, after much conjugal pressure, Karren had agreed to invite Jennerton over for an evening. The solido demonstration was to have been the high point. But Jennerton did not seem at all impressed.

"Of course I'm proud of it," Karren retorted. "Not



He found himself in a wonder-world of exact science.

many people own a solido-projector, and I'm proud to be able to demonstrate one in my own home."

"You don't seem to understand," Jennerton said, and Karren observed the nostrils of his magnificent aquiline nose flicker in a gesture he had long since learned signified impatience. "When you say you're *proud* of owning this solido-projector, what do you really mean? Learn to examine the meanings of your words, Karren; it's the only way to survive in this world."

"I've studied semantics—"

"So has everyone else," Jennerton continued coolly. "But most people stop thinking when they leave college. Here's what I'm driving at," the big man said. "The source of your pride in the solido-projector is really your purchasing power. You're terribly puffed up simply because you're able to afford one. Do you share any pride of craftsmanship with the men who made it? No. Do you know how it works? No. You take a pile of credits to the store, and they give you a machine. You plug it in, and then you say you're proud of it." He spoke quickly.

"Now hold on a minute,

Jennerton. Not everyone can own—"

"You're missing my point completely, as expected. Man, you're old-fashioned. You're just a spectator in this great technological world of ours, not a participator. You're nothing more than a vegetable!"

"I'm not going to stand for that, Jennerton," said Karren angrily, snapping off the solido. The image of his wife and children spiralled into a small vortex of rainbow colors and vanished.

"Let's not start an argument, Phil," said Jennerton's tall blonde wife. She tugged on his arm, but he ignored her. He tried to goon, but Jennerton continued.

"Let me explain," Jennerton said. "I don't mean to insult you, but I mean what I say. Being proud of something you didn't make yourself is a sign of decadence, of overspecialization. You don't have any more idea of why that machine works than I do about what you had for breakfast early this morning. You're just content to go along mindlessly, piling up credits at whatever job you make your living, and spending them on gadgets that you'll never understand. Pardon me if I'm speaking

strongly, old man, but I feel strongly about this."

"But what would you have me do?" Karren said. "*Build a solido?*"

"I did," said Jennerton blandly.

"You *what?*"

"I said I built one. Every bit as good as yours, even better. I added one little wrinkle that the commercial ones don't have yet. I hooked mine up with a senso circuit, and when I show my slides I'm able to reproduce every sound and smell I experienced when taking them."

Karren remembered the salty sea-odor he had thought of while showing the slide.

"That must be good," he said weakly. "Makes the scene even more real."

"Of course. But I had to do it myself. And that's the basis of contemporary civilization, Karen. *Do it yourself*. It's the only way a man can maintain any smidgin of self-respect. Everyone does it; you're the first educated man I've seen who relies wholly on commercial readymades. If you let yourself be bullied by technologists, you'll march on from one gadget to the next without ever understanding why the world runs the way it does. And the longer that goes on, the deeper you slip

down into the mindless muck."

Karren looked at the solido-projector, which now had taken on an ominous, threatening character, and at the intense, powerful figure of Jennerton.

"You build things yourself?" he ventured timidly.

"Phil builds all sorts of things," said Mrs. Jennerton. "Just last week he put together a pretty little transistor wrist-radio for Carrie, so she wouldn't miss her favorite programs when she's coming home from school."

"That's right," Jennerton said. "I build everything. Washing machines, TV sets, air conditioner—you name it. And it's not because we can't afford readymades. No; most of the time the separate parts cost more than a readymade would, but—"

It seemed to Karren that at this Mrs. Jennerton widened her eyes in surprise, as if this were something new to her, but Jennerton continued right on.

"Yes, sometimes I spend more," he went on. "But at least I'm fully alive to 21st Century technology, which you're not. As I said, you're a vegetable — completely passive."



Karren looked at him grimly, and saw his wife also staring at Jennerton. "What do you mean, vegetable? If I had wanted to, I could have built all those things too. I'm just not interested."

"That's it exactly," Jennerton said triumphantly. "You sit back and let technology overwhelm you, and then you say you're not interested. You can't sit still. Pretty soon you're outmoded."

"Let me worry about that," Karren said, and flicked the solido-projector back on.

But he did worry about it, for the rest of that evening, after the Jennertons had roundly trounced him and his wife at a game of Canada and had consumed most of his remaining Scotch and had finally gone home, bubbling over with arrogant gaiety.

As he began to tidy up the living room before retiring, he glumly considered the implications of Jennerton's argument. The electronic dust-catcher seemed to accuse him grimly as he wandered around the living room, straightening cushions and replacing doilies. The solido-projector gaped bleakly at him, and from the kitchen the sound of the dish-dryer whirled incessantly into his tired, dis-

couraged mind. Jennerton was right. So far as contemporary technology was concerned, he thought, he *was* a vegetable. He had only the vaguest notion of how his autococtor worked, none whatsoever of the principles behind the electronic duster or the dish-dryer or the solido-projector or any of the other things he had accumulated during fifteen years of more-or-less happy house-keeping.

His wife finished her chores and came in.

"You know, dear, I think perhaps Phil's right. So many men build things for themselves these days; it's a fascinating hobby, I hear. And all that talk about technology—I think he may have something there!

"I'm sure he does, Helen," Karren said wearily.

"And there's something else I've meant to tell you all week. The Browns have a wonderful new robot watchdog. It keeps strangers away, and I think Hal built it himself, and—"

"Yes, I saw it," he said, dropping down tiredly on a couch. "Very handy gadget."

"You don't think you—"

But the idea had hit Karren first.

He set to work with fran-

tic haste, converting a section of the basement into a workshop. Karren buckled down to the job with determination. He intended to demonstrate to himself, to his wife, and especially to Jennerton that he was as capable as the next man of making intelligent use of contemporary technology; he was not going to sit back with his readymades and grow roots, not in a world where the dominant philosophy was Do it Yourself.

The first step was a trip to the library, from whence he returned burdened by three textbooks of robotics and a short introductory guide to electronics. Next, acquisition of blueprints, soldering iron, solenoids, riveter, and a host of other items, the very names of which he had not even known the week before.

After a few false starts he got to work on a robot watchdog, similar to the one the Browns had. It ought to impress Jennerton, Karren thought, and it'll be a useful sort of thing besides. As the days passed, he found himself growing steadily more adept at mechanical techniques, and, almost before he realized it, the watchdog was completed and he was sur-

veying the finished product.

The rivets up the left side wandered a little out, but otherwise it was an impressive job. The completed robot watchdog was a squat, stubby metal box with two gleaming solenoid eyes and short ball-bearing legs. When indoctrinated, it would require all visitors to the Karren house to identify themselves, and it would transmit the identification to the Karrens inside the house. It could be adjusted so members of Karren's family and certain close friends would be passed through without question.

Karren folded up his worksmock and activated the watchdog. He had equipped it with several motion-patterns, and he set it for the one in which it would follow him obediently around. Then, triumphantly, he headed out to display it to Jennerton.

The watchdog tagged along behind him, purring softly, as he crossed over and headed for Jennerton's house. He rang the bell.

"Good to see you, Karren," boomed a hearty voice.

Karren looked up at Jennerton's big figure framed in the doorway. He was wearing a softly-glowing plastiline jacket, and his graying hair was trimmed close to the

scalp in a rugged-looking crew cut. He gestured for Karren to come in, and as he did so Jennerton closed the door behind him. The robot watchdog climbed the steps, batted against the closed door, and buzzed impotently outside.

Karren opened the door and the watchdog shot through and came to a halt next to his trousers-leg. "What's that?" Jennerton asked.

"I've taken your advice," Karren said. "I've done a little job of construction. Put together this watchdog the other day," he said casually. "Thought you'd like to see it. It was a lot easier than I thought it would be." He looked at Jennerton a bit smugly.

"Of course," Jennerton said. "I'll bet you enjoyed doing it, too. It must have given you a feeling of real satisfaction, discovering that you could cope with robotics." He bent down and lifted the watchdog expertly, cradling it in his arms while it hummed gently.

"Rivets a little lopsided here," he said. "You still need practice."

"Yes, of course," Karren said. "But you have to admit it's a pretty good piece of workmanship."

"Sure, it is—for a beginner," Jennerton said. Karren felt devastated. All that work, tossed off in one sentence. Pretty good—for a beginner.

He looked up at Jennerton, and started to say something, when suddenly he felt chill hands lift his coat off his shoulders. He whirled and confronted a short figure with a cold, metallic face.

A robot.

"Hope he didn't frighten you," Jennerton said. "I just activated him the other day, and the word's not around yet that I have one."

Karren studied the robot. It was about five feet tall, roughly humanoid, with a few extra non-humanoid features, such as a pair of long, wiry tentacles and a strange-looking multipurpose fifth arm.

"Pretty nice, eh? Does the dishes, mixes drinks with that other arm, minds the baby, winds the clock, walks and talks, and it's a shark at Canada. Strange we should both be dabbling in robotics at the same time, isn't it?"

"Very strange," Karen said, and then he realized it. "You mean you *built* that robot?" He looked down at his watchdog, making small circles around his feet. Sud-

denly the watchdog seemed a pathetic, inconsequential little thing.

"Of course," Jennerton said jovially. "After all I said when I was over at your house, you didn't think I'd be buying one, did you? No, I built it. Took a couple of weeks. I'm sort of proud of it," he said.

"You should be," said Karren, looking at his watchdog. "I feel very—very—well, envious."

"No need to be," Jenner-ton replied. "It's just a matter of application, of good hard work. The technology's nothing at all, nothing at all. But say—care for a drink? I'll have my robot mix you something."

Karren stared gloomily at the little robot watchdog, feeling utterly deflated. He had gone to Jennerton's bursting with pride, but after Jennerton had finished describing the circuits of his robot butler, Karren and his watchdog had slunk home, crushed.

### *Inferiority.*

That was the word he found it impossible to escape. For the first time he noticed how frequently the other men at the office talked of building some gadget or other, the

ease with which they contemplated their projects, and he became acutely conscious of his own mechanical ineptitude. There was always the towering figure of Jennerton to remind him of his—inferiority.

He discovered that there was a tremendous Do-It-Yourself craze in which almost everyone seemed involved but himself. While he had blissfully gone on buying ready-made dishwashers and solido-projectors, just about everybody else had succumbed to the delights of Do-It-Yourself.

Karren deliberately began a campaign of studying technical books, subscribing to home mechanics magazines, coming home with great boxes of components. Somewhere in the back of his mind he felt amusement and horror at the hobby Jennerton had goaded him into, but he felt now that he would be marked forever as an out-cast, an incompetent, unless—

What was it Jennerton had said, that fateful first night? "*Do it yourself.* It's the only way a man can maintain any smidgin of self-respect."

He began disappearing into his workshop as soon as he returned home each night,

often toiling long hours into the night.

An electronic mousetrap.

A steam-heated bird-house.

A collapsible canoe for use on summer hiking trips.

A monstrous bookcase with built-in dust-removing circuits.

A twelve-stringed guitar.

He showed each new gadget to his wife and family with pride, and contrived to get Jennerton over to see and be impressed. But somehow Jennerton failed to be impressed.

The dust-removing bookcase had an occasional tendency to swallow a book or two along with the dust. "It doesn't really matter," Karren protested. "What's a book or two?"

But Jennerton fixed that with a couple of twists of his pliers, and Karren mentally kicked himself.

Then something went wrong with the detector of the electronic mousetrap and it snapped the robot watchdog by mistake, causing serious feedbacks in the nervous systems of both articles. Jennerton came over, amiably disconnected both of them, and repaired the damage, explaining to Karren what he should have done to avoid such difficulties.

Helen frequently complained now, both about Karren's preoccupation with do-it-yourself things and Jenner-ton's obvious superiority. The more she spoke about the big man's ability, the harder Karren was goaded to the workshop. And he worked with a hopeless desperation.

For Jennerton's skill was incredible. Besides repairing the inevitable flaws in the items Karren assembled, the big man turned out quite a collection of things himself. In short order he designed and built a robot nursemaid, a radio-TV that turned itself on when the baseball games were broadcast and shut off when the last out was recorded, a self-propelling baby carriage, an automatic potato-peeler. And they worked flawlessly.

Karren plunged deeper and deeper into the workshop world. He began to wear an angry, hunted look. His work at the office suffered, his children never saw him, he snarled at his wife on those infrequent moments when he emerged from his workshop. But still, every gadget he designed was promptly topped by something which Jennerton had apparently turned out between sneezes one morning, and Jennerton

seemed to take real delight in tracking down the bugs in Karren's devices and setting them straight.

Karren's house now overflowed with strange and impossible things: butterfly nets, skin-diving outfits, toasters boasting little hands that would pluck the toast and butter it. If it could be built yourself, Karren built one.

The idea for the cybernetic brain came to him one day when Billy, his oldest son, had wandered into the workshop to get some help with his math homework. Karren's irritation changed to delight when the idea came to him, and he set to work.

The huge thing occupied what had formerly been the guest room. Karren toiled for days and nights on it, feeling like Michelangelo in the Sistine as he patiently assembled one tiny part after another and hooked them all together. At last it was complete, and he invited Jennerton over for the usual demonstration.

"I'll begin with something simple," Karren said, noting with a thrill of pure joy Jennerton's whistle of amazement at the sight of the formidable computer.

He tapped out a simple equation and fed it to the machine.

$$2X \text{ Plus } X = 18$$

Immedaitley the answer clicked out.

$$X = 7.$$

Karren showed the tape to Jennerton, waved it joyously around.

"Very good," Jennerton said. "Just one trouble. In that equation, X is 6."

"What?" Karren looked at the tape, then at his son's algebra book, and to his horror saw that the big man was right. The machine had made an error on its first try.

"Let's try again," he said, mustering a heartiness he did not feel.

$$3X \text{ Plus } Y = 24$$

$$Y = 6$$

Without a moment's hesitation, the machine clicked back.

$$X = 7.$$

Karren began frantically to search through his schematics, wondering where he had gone wrong. By the time he found the error (a trifling miswiring) Jennerton had already corrected it and the computer was happily spewing out differential equations.

Karren remained in the grip of despair for almost a week, sitting silently in the

living room, growling at anyone who approached, wondering why it was that the whole world could do things while he invariably failed.

Jennerton's house was now bristling with new gadgets; Michael Karren couldn't even bear to look at it through the window.

But after a while, the cloud lifted. Karren resumed everyday life, carefully avoiding Jennerton. And now, he started to make thoughtful inquiries.

"Been doing any handiwork yourself, Joe?" he would ask. "Any projects on the line?"

And slowly the truth came to him.

*He was just like everybody else.*

Jennerton hadn't lied. This was an age of Do-It-Yourself. But Karren was a perfectly normal, ordinary man, and the average man is a fumbler. Karren gradually discovered that his mechanical mishaps were perfectly customary, that most of the other local build-it men had had similar troubles.

No. Jennerton had embarked on a deliberate campaign to convince Michael Karren that he was inferior. For what reasons, Karren didn't know and didn't care. Per-

haps, he thought, it was sheer pride; Jennerton, so swelled up by his uncanny mechanical aptitude, was loftily reaching down to crush Michael Karren's soul with god-like gratuitousness.

It didn't matter why. Jennerton was doing it. And so, Karren set about constructing his last do-it-yourself project, the one that would symbolize his final capitulation to Jennerton.

He built it in the garage, moving the autocopter to the roof, keeping the garage-door locked at all times. When anyone questioned him, he explained that he was working on something new, something that represented a completely unthought-of advance in the do-it-yourself field.

At length it was completed, and he invited Jennerton over to see it in operation.

"You look terrible, Mike," Jennerton said as he approached. He smiled heartily.

"I know," said Karren. "I've been working till all hours. But I've built something new," he said dreamily. "Something that will revolutionize the whole do-it-yourself field. And it's a gift—for you."

"For me?"

"Yes, Phil," Karren said,

almost affectionately. "I did it all specially for you—and here it is."

Inside was a squat metal cabinet, unpainted, rectangular, about seven feet square.

"What is this, Mike?" asked Jennerton. "A joke?"

"I made it for you because you love to do things yourself. It's the ultimate do-it-yourself gadget." He pressed a button on the side, feeling his moment of triumph at last approaching, and a door in the cabinet opened, disclosing a roaring furnace within. A pair of metallic arms shot out from the sides of the cabinet, wrapping

around Jennerton and pinioning him firmly.

"What the hell, Mike?"

"Don't you see?" Karren asked. "You like to do things yourself. Here's your big chance. All you have to do is press this button over here, and the arms will transport you smoothly inside. Inside, there is light—like the sun. It's a Karren Jiffy Crematorium, specially created for self-use. Go on, Phil—press the button. Here's your chance."

He smiled. Jennerton's last do-it-yourself act wouldn't require any talent at all. Why, Karren could even help him, if necessary.

THE END



"A pretty sneaky way to get out early!"



# SLEEP IT OFF

By  
HENRY  
SLESAR

*In days to come you will be able to sleep off old age, disease, failure in business, —almost anything that ails you. In fact, Adam Dugdale went even further. He tried to sleep off a murder!*

THE Somnibus discharged seven passengers at the Los Alamos Sleep Center. Only one of them, a reedy youth of nineteen, seemed happily excited at the prospect that lay before them.

Adam Dugdale's mood was one of solemn determination. His curiosity about his fellow-passengers had been exhausted on the half-hour journey from Pueblo. The nineteen-year-old, he had guessed, was a runaway from parental pressures, seeking the thrill of awakening in some alabaster future. The other five were elderly people, hoping to enjoy their remaining years in a tomorrow that would be kinder and more respectful to their venerable age.

Adam himself was only

forty; the age, he told himself bitterly, when life begins. But it wasn't a new beginning he sought in the world of forty-years from now. His brooding thoughts were on revenge, a misty, shadowy revenge he could hardly define for himself.

A Sleep Center official, wearing a trim brown uniform, guided them inside the flat-roofed stone house that was the only surface evidence of the subterranean mile that composed the Center. On the dusty road outside, the Somnibus roared off on its lonely return trip, the disappearing sound of its motor signifying to Adam the finality of his decision.

He looked around the room. The coral walls were decorated with colorful posters,



In his crazed mind, her death seemed the only answer.

depicting scenes of an imaginary future. The paintings were crudely exciting in their comic-book simplicity, but in Adam's cynical mood they produced only a mental sneer. Not one scene admitted the possibility of future tragedy: atomic war, ruin, desolation, depression. Yet, he admitted, that would be poor salesmanship indeed for Sleep Centers, Inc.

But Adam's mind was centered on tragedy, for he believed that Sylvia's letter—the letter that still remained folded in his jacket pocket—was a symbol of his own personal tragedy: the tragedy of loving too late.

*"You know I've always said that age doesn't matter," she had written. "But was it Chekov who said 'youth calls to youth'? Am I the victim of some inexorable law of nature? I wish I knew, Adam. But somehow, all I know is that my feeling for you underwent a strange transformation when you asked me to marry you. I know how cruel my answer must have sounded to you. I'm not proud of my feelings, Adam, believe me. Twenty years isn't much of a separation between a man and a woman. I've told myself that a thousand times. But when the moment came*

*at last, the time of decision, suddenly it seemed like a hundred years to me. Can you understand me just a little, Adam? And more important, can you forgive me? It's not you. How shall I put this? It's your birthdate . . ."*

Adam forced his mind away from the memorized words.

"I said, how long are you going to Sleep?"

"What?" Adam turned to the speaker. It was the youth, sitting on the bench alongside him.

"Oh," said Adam vaguely. "Forty years."

The boy smiled archly, like a young girl with a secret. "I'm sleeping sixty," he announced proudly. "The world oughta be pretty terrific in sixty years."

Adam smiled without humor. "It should be indeed."

"Jet autos. Private helicopters. Three-D television." The boy gazed off in space with the dedicated look of the hobbyist, the hot-rod enthusiast, the gadget-fancier. "And maybe space ships," he added, his eyes glowing. "The Moon. Mars. Venus."

"And maybe market crashes," said Adam, still smiling. "Breadlines. Plagues. Bomb craters." The boy

stared at him stupidly, unequipped to understand his pessimism. Adam's words dulled some of the luster in his eyes, and he shifted his gaze away uncomfortably. He rose awkwardly, and with assumed nonchalance, picked up a Sleep Center booklet from a table and flipped over its pages.

From the corner of his eye, Adam noted the familiar contents of the booklet. It was printed in cheerful blues and pinks, and titled "LET'S SLEEP WITH SUSAN!" The title reflected the mood of the contents—a flippant, jolly, humorous approach to the whole subject of Suspended Animation. Each word had been carefully engineered by the thoroughest Motivation Research the advertising world could obtain. "*Got A Problem? Sleep It Off!*" urged one page, depicted Mr. Harried Taxpayer moaning over the morning headlines. "*They May Cure It In Fifty Years!*" said another page, showing a bed-ridden patient with a curvacious cartoon nurse. "*More Money For You In 1992!*" coaxed another page, diagramming a green stack of compound interest money pouring out of a bank into the widespread arms of a gleeful woman.

It was all very gay, and full of charming argument, and so reassuring about the Susan process that you never once entertained the thought that a Sleep Center was, after all, a living graveyard.

The boy had reached the last page, when a pretty young woman, with blonde curls tucked tightly under a smart brown cap, entered the room and smiled winningly at the seven clients of the Center.

"Good morning!" she said brightly. "I'm Irma Coolidge, your hostess. I'll be serving you sandwiches and coffee at eleven o'clock, but right now I'd like to give you an idea of your itinerary."

She sat herself at a small desk in front of the room, and folded her hands like a schoolmarm. "From here you'll proceed to the examining room, which is just down the hall. Doctor Hopkins will give you your final physical. Please be sure to have your medical records ready for the doctor. Next, I'll take you to our briefing room, where Mr. Frances, our director, will describe the entire SusAn process once more. I'm sure you're all acquainted with our method through our literature, but we want to be sure

you enter the sleeping stage with your minds free of doubt and fear. Next we'll go to the company vault, and I'll take care of your valuables. Then we'll return here and all have something to eat. Any questions? . . . Fine. Then let's pick up our things and see the doctor."

As they filed out of the room, Adam found himself behind an elderly couple that had sat in silence throughout the bus trip. The man had his bony arm about the woman, guiding her tenderly. She was shaking her white-haired head from side-to-side, and saying: "Ten years, Harry . . . such a long time . . ."

"In ten years, he'll be a normal boy," said the man. "He won't need us till then, Martha. Think of that . . ."

"But ten years! It's such a long time, Harry . . ."

And forty years is longer, thought Adam. Would his revenge wait for him that long?

The world was red, and noisy.

Adam's eyes scanned the room wildly, seeking the source of the crimson brightness and alarming clangor. He found them at last: a small, flashing red bulb and a signal bell near his head. The light and the sound filled

him with a sense of emergency, with the desire to spring into some indefinable action. He swung his legs off the bed, but when his feet hit the floor, he was stunned by a shock-wave of pain. A mantle of blackness was thrown over him, and then quickly replaced by a sunburst of light. He realized that a man's hands were gripping his bare shoulder, and for some unaccountable reason, he cried out and flung them away from him.

"Let go of me!"

"Easy, Mr. Dugdale," said a voice.

Adam blinked at the man, who wore a simple white coat.

"There's nothing to be sore about," said the man. "It's just a reaction. You'll be okay."

Adam looked down at himself. "I'm naked," he said loudly. "Get me some clothes, for God's sake!"

"Your clothes are right here, Mr. Dugdale." The orderly's voice was soothing, conciliatory, but even in Adam's confused state he recognized the undertone of contempt.

"I don't know why you Sleepers get so sore," the man chuckled. He handed Adam an armful of clothing. They looked like Adam's own, but

the fabric was strangely different, with a dull metallic shimmer.

"When you're dressed, give me a call and I'll take you to the M.E. Do you know what year it is?"

"What?" asked Adam dully, looking at the odd seamless sleeves of the jacket in his lap.

"The year. Do you know what it is?"

Adam frowned. "Nineteen. Nineteen something—"

The man laughed. "You're still asleep," he said.

"No!" Adam shook his head violently. "It's 2012. It's forty years—"

"Okay, okay. Get dressed now, Mr. Dugdale. You've got a busy schedule." He turned and left the tiny room.

Adam put the soft underwear on slowly. Then, with a sudden recollection, he clutched the jacket and went searching inside for the breast pocket. He found what he was looking for, but its edges were now brown and crumpling with age, and he could barely make out the faded purple writing.

"Forty years!" he whispered.

As he entered the rented auto, with its sweeping plastic dome and automatic con-

trols, Adam's mind dwelt only superficially on the marvels of this 2012 vehicle. It had taken the Sleep Center Directory Service just four days to locate Sylvia, who was now living in a suburb just seventy miles from the Village apartment of Adam's memory. He slipped the road directions absently into his pocket, and set his sights on the clean stretch of superhighway before him.

When the car was humming swiftly forward, his mind turned once again to the Way it was Going to Be . . . The sequence of events.

He would ring the doorbell, and hear Sylvia's familiar quick footsteps. They would be slower now, of course—forty years would take the click out of a girl's high heels. She would open the door, and stand there for a moment, mouth agape, eyes shining with instant recognition. She would still look like Sylvia, all right, but her hair would have grayed with the years, and creases would have invaded the smooth skin about her eyes and mouth. She would have retained her slimmness, but she would no longer be supple, no longer be as languorous as the panther he once compared her to.

"Adam!" she would gasp,

and he would smile slowly, cynically.

"How are you, Sylvia?" he would ask calmly. "May I come in?"

She would be hesitant, but would usher him inside. (His mind drew a blank at the decor of her home; all he could visualize was the casual, easy-going, disarrayed furnishings of her Village apartment.) She would offer him a drink, and he would say polite things about how well she looked, but his words would be barbed. He would sit back on the sofa, looking very debonair, wearing his forty years with such youthful grace that she would be tormented by envy and the sense of long-lost happiness.

He would ask her why she had never married, and she would make some stumbling explanation. Yet he would know by her faltering answer that she regretted *The Letter* now, and that the *amours* that followed Adam had seemed tasteless and unimportant. (He smiled at the thought of this.)

The threads of his reverie were snapped as Adam saw an approaching road sign. It read: MILTON — NEXT RIGHT. He steered the car easily into the right lane, and

made the turn. His heart was pounding.

The house was a small split-level, set back half a mile from the main thoroughfare. To Adam, it seemed like a dazzling combination of redwood, fieldstone, and shining glass—exactly the kind of house Sylvia had talked of wistfully as she lay on her back in front of her apartment fireplace, looking up at the jagged cracks in the ceiling. But like the futuristic auto, it interested Adam far less than the woman he had traveled forty years to see.

His hand was trembling as he reached out for the bright yellow buzzer. He pressed it, and listened to the melodious sound of chimes behind the door. He held his breath while the latch clicked.

"My God!" he said.

The pretty woman who had answered looked at him curiously.

"Sylvia!" he said.

The woman looked doubtful. "What is it?"

"It's me," he said hoarsely. "Adam. Adam Dugdale."

"Adam!" Her lovely mouth gaped in wonderment, just as he had imagined. But never had he imagined that she would be unchanged—completely, beautifully unchanged!

"Adam, for Heaven's sake! Come in!"

He backed away from the door.

"You can't be Sylvia!" he cried. "It's forty years!"

"Come in and don't be a fool."

He swallowed hard and followed her inside. As the door closed behind him, an explanation struck him.

"Of course!" he said. "You're her daughter. She's gone and had a daughter!" He laughed uncertainly.

The woman dropped onto a long sofa, and found herself a cigarette on a table nearby. She gave Adam an amused smile as she lit it.

"You're still a flatterer, Adam." She patted the seat beside her. "Now sit down and tell me what you've been doing all these years."

"This is some kind of joke," he rasped. "You can't be Sylvia. You can't be more than twenty. Sylvia was twenty back in 1972."

"1972?" The woman blew a cloud of smoke towards him. "Of course. I remember now. That was the year you asked me to marry you. That was the year your transportation business failed, too. You were sweet, Adam. I remember. You even cried a little, right here in my arms, didn't you?"

Adam's legs weakened. He sat himself on a chair and buried his face in his hands. "I know what you did," he said. "You ran off to a Sleep Center, too. And after all your disgust with the idea—"

"You're wrong." The woman stamped out her cigarette. "I did nothing of the kind, Adam. You know how I feel about the graveyard."

Adam opened his hands and stared at her. "Then how is it possible—"

She laughed. "A lot can happen in forty years, Adam. A woman can find many ways of staying young." She got up and went to him. "Poor little Adam," she crooned, putting an arm across his shoulders. "Running away from the present like a naughty child. Did you really do it because of me? Or were there other reasons? Was I just an excuse, Adam?"

"Stop it!" he said savagely. "You know I loved you. You know you meant everything to me!"

She kissed him lightly on the forehead. "Poor Adam. Poor weak, silly, romantic Adam . . ."

"Sylvia!" Adam's quick movement caught the girl's hands in his. "Sylvia, listen to me. I don't care what's hap-



pened. Do you understand? I know how you felt about me. You said it yourself—"

"Adam, let me go." She tried to pull away.

"You said it wasn't *me*. You said it was my birth-date." He released her and dove into his jacket for The Letter. "Look," he said. "It's right here. You said—"

"Adam, don't!" The woman went to the window and turned her back on him. "That letter is forty years old."

"Not to me!" he said angrily. "To me it's yesterday, Sylvia—yesterday! You told me that it was twenty years that kept us apart, remember? I was too old for you. Do you remember that?"

She was silent. Adam stood up and swayed towards her.

"I was too old for you then, Sylvia. But now—"

"Now *what*, Adam?"

"Now—" Adam moved towards her hesitantly. "Now *you're* the older one, Sylvia. But I don't feel as you did. Don't you see? I don't feel that way at all."

He came up behind her and put his hands on her waist.

"Sylvia, do I have to explain? Do you have to torture me all over again? I love you. I want to marry you."

Adam lifted his hands

away as the woman turned. Her face was expressionless as their eyes met. Then she laughed. It was a short, meaningless laugh when she started. Then it became loud, raucous, almost vulgar. It clanged in Adam's ears, and sent pinwheels dancing before his eyes.

"Marry *you*?" she said.

"Sylvia, listen—"

"No, you listen, Adam." She reached out for his arm and steered him to a mirrored wall. "And now you look. And now you tell me who's older. Who's older, Adam?"

He turned his eyes away. "This is crazy—"

"Do you think I didn't mean what I said all those years ago? Do you think I didn't love my youth then? Do you think I don't love it now?"

She stepped away from him, and there was disgust in her eyes.

"You're still too old for me, Adam. Do you understand. *You're still too old!*"

"Sylvia!"

He rushed at her, but there was no caress in his outthrust arms. There was no sweet emotion in his burning eyes, no tenderness in his strong hands.

"Adam—don't—"

He embraced her, but with

a different passion; held her close, but without the gentle yearning of romance.

*"You're choking me . . ."*

Her slender throat, soft and white as the wing of a dove . . .

"ADAM!"

There was a shattering silence.

The embrace was over. The woman's limp body slipped from his arms and crumpled shapelessly to the floor.

He looked down at her uncertainly.

"Sylvia," he said quietly.

He knew she could never answer.

He walked over to the sofa, buttoning his jacket carefully. Her cigarette still held a smoldering ash, and without thinking, he crushed it cold. He went over to the window and looked out. A cloud drifted momentarily past the sun, and then moved on.

"I've killed her," he said aloud. It was as final as that. Then he left the room.

There wasn't much surprise in the face of the Sleep Center receptionist when Adam approached her desk.

"My name is Dugdale," he said softly. "Registration Number T-8964. I—I came out last week."

"Of course, Mr. Dugdale.

How are you?" She flashed him a professional smile.

"Fine. I mean—I have a question to ask. About Sleeping."

The receptionist looked knowing. "Would you like to be SusAned again?"

"That's it." Adam felt relieved. Obviously, there was precedent for this sort of thing. "This world isn't what I expected. I'd like to go a bit further—ten years, to be exact."

"Surely." The girl wrote something on a pad and flipped the phone switch. "You'll find that we can expedite return sleeping, since we have already accumulated data on our clients who come back. Mrs. Hughes?" she said into the phone. "Another two-timer." She winked at Adam, and covered the receiver with her hand. "Just our little joke," she said confidentially.

It wasn't until the tiny door thudded shut that Adam felt safe.

The world was red, and noisy.

Adam's eyes scanned the room wildly, seeking the source of the crimson brightness and alarming clangor. He found them at last: a small flashing red bulb, and a signal bell near his head. The light and the sound filled him with

a sense of emergency, with the desire to spring into some indefinable action. He swung his legs off the bed, but when his feet hit the floor, he was stunned by a shock-wave of pain. A mantle of blackness was thrown over him, and then quickly replaced by a sunburst of light. He realized that a man's hands were gripping his bare shoulder, and for some unaccountable reason, he cried out and flung them away from him.

"Let go of me!"

"Easy, Mr. Dugdale," said a voice.

Adam blinked at the man. He was tall and beefy, and wore a business suit, with a felt hat still on his head.

"You'll be okay," he said. "There's always some kind of reaction after a Sleep. My name's Murchison."

Adam nodded at him, and wondered how many centuries it would be before a cop took his hat off indoors.

"Lieutenant Murchison," the man added. "P.E.B."

"Am I under arrest?" asked Adam.

"Technically, yes."

Adam bowed his head. "I knew I couldn't get away with it. Get me some clothes."

When he had dressed, Adam put his hand on the de-

tective's arm and said: "Listen. I don't suppose it's any good to tell you this, but I didn't mean to kill her. I'm not saying it was an accident. But I lost my head—"

Murchison stopped him. "What are you talking about?"

"Sylvia. The girl I killed."

The lieutenant stared at him blankly. "First time I heard of it," he said.

"Isn't that why you're here?" Adam's pulse quickened. Had he made a stupid error? Was Murchison ignorant of the murder? Why else would the police be here?

"I don't know anything about a murder, Mr. Dugdale. My job is to close up joints like this."

"I don't get it."

"P.E.B. Guess you don't know what it stands for, Mr. Dugdale. You been sleeping a long time. It means Prohibition Enforcement Bureau."

"Prohibition? You mean the Sleep Centers are outlawed?"

"Congress did it five years ago. They had to. Everything was going to pot. Manpower buried underground. Labor forces depleted. Kids running away from home and jumping into the future. You know, there was a time back there when some parts of the coun-

try had forty percent of the population snoozing away."

"But couldn't it be controlled? I mean—there were restrictions—"

"Sure, there were laws. No military personnel could Sleep. Sure. So enlistment drops off to nothing. Call for conscription, and every draft-age kid is growing a moustache and greasing their way into a Sleep Center. Forbid women Sleepers? The feminists get you. Threaten to revoke citizenship? The Liberty committees are on your neck. No, nothing worked—so they just called a halt to the whole business."

"Then what about this place?" asked Adam.

"It's a Sleepeasy. Used to be legitimate in your time, of course. Then when Congress made its move, they packed up and came out here. You're in Denver, in case you didn't know it, Mr. Dugdale. Well, let's get going. I want to hear all about this murder of yours."

On the drive to the station house, Adam told Murchison the whole bitter story.

"I know I was wrong," Adam said. "Nobody has to tell me that. The whole idea was wrong from the beginning. Now I know that it

wasn't just Sylvia that made me go to the Sleep Center. My whole life wasn't shaping up, so I took the first chance to run away from it. Sylvia wasn't just a girl who didn't want me. She was my big Excuse."

The lieutenant said nothing for a while. Then he stopped the car and turned to Adam.

"There's just one thing about your story that doesn't make sense, Mr. Dugdale," he said. "If you went back to the Sleep Center for another ten years, it ought to be 2022 A.D. Is that right?"

Adam nodded. "Of course."

"But it isn't, Mr. Dugdale." Murchison drew a pocket calendar from his wallet and dropped it in Adam's lap.

"Look at that. It's 2012 A.D. Forty years from the time you went to Sleep."

"Forty years?" Adam looked at the calendar in bewilderment. "But that's impossible. It *must* be fifty."

Murchison grinned. "It's only forty, Mr. Dugdale. And as for that murder—you can forget it."

The lieutenant started the car again.

"After all, Mr. Dugdale—when you sleep for forty years, you're entitled to at least *one* nightmare."

**THE END**



"Scrup sclopf munkl to you, too!"

# THE NURSERY COMMANDOS

By ADAM CHASE

*Normal, healthy-minded kids live in a dream world. And this world is pretty elastic. It can be populated by Hop-along Cassidy in the morning and Buck Rogers in the afternoon. A six-gun can turn into a ray-gun between bites on a candy bar. A rather unstable existence, you say? Perhaps, but these kids may be our last and best weapon.*

IS THAT you, Eli?" Eli Wallace's mother called when he had gone halfway up the stairs.

"Yes, Ma," Eli said reluctantly, one foot poised to continue climbing.

"Come down here, Eli. Your father and I want to talk to you."

Feet dragging, Eli went downstairs. He had reddish blond hair and freckles, but you couldn't see the freckles for the greasy smudges on his face. His shorts and polo

shirt were begrimed and torn. He looked as if he had just come through a battle-zone, miraculously unscathed.

Mr. and Mrs. Wallace were finishing their supper. Mr. Wallace was smoking a cigarette and studying the outline of a T-bone on his plate. Mrs. Wallace said:

"You realize, Eli, this is the fourth night in a row you were late for supper. We didn't wait."

"Aw," Eli said.

"Eli, don't you know when

you're supposed to come home?"

Being eight years old, Eli had an eight-year-old's appetite, but he said, "I guess I forgot. I guess I just wasn't hungry." But his mouth began to water as he looked at the empty plates.

"Do you realize that you worried your father and me? What have you been doing?"

"Just the gang," Eli Wallace said. "There was a stagecoach come down Spring Street with a hun'ed dollars in gold bull-yon and everything. We shot the driver and the guard and took the bull-yon. I woulda been earlier, Ma, only the stagecoach was late."

"Stagecoach!" Mrs. Wallace said in exasperation. Mr. Wallace hid a grin behind his hand.

"Well, honest, Ma. The whole gang was there." Eli patted the six-shooter hanging at his side. "I shot the guard," he said proudly. "Got him right in the head!"

"You can play any game you want, I guess, Eli Wallace," Mrs. Wallace said, grinning a little too. "But in the future you remember your suppertime and see that you come home when you're supposed to. Promise?"

Eli nodded earnestly, then

said: "If the sheriff comes, I'm not home. Promise?"

Mr. Wallace turned away, laughing and trying to hide his laughter. Mrs. Wallace said: "Well, all right. A promise for a promise. And no supper for you tonight, young man."

Eli trudged out of the dining room and upstairs.

"I really think Eli shouldn't watch so much TV," Mrs. Wallace said. "That's where they get those ideas, Sam. From TV. Don't you see, Eli and that whole gang of his really believe the games they play. They're just too real. Sam, if Eli doesn't start to grasp pretty firmly the difference between fact and fantasy, I want you to ask Dr. Stanley what we ought to do."

"Now wait a minute, Martha," Mr. Wallace said. "If this thing's getting out of hand anywhere, it's in your own mind. They're only making believe. Sure, they try to make their games as realistic as possible. Maybe in the heat of the moment they actually think they're holding up a stagecoach. It's perfectly natural. They know they aren't, not really."

"It's just that Eli's so— well, earnest about it."

"So are the others. I've seen them at play."

"Well, Sam—I don't know. I just don't know. I wish you'd have a talk with the boy, though."

Mr. Wallace mumbled an answer which left the issue hanging in air, and went into the living room for his newspaper.

Upstairs in his room, Eli was stretched out on the bed, resting. He'd need all the rest he could get. They were going out to a secret meeting tonight. Eli's breath came faster when he thought about it. Midnight. A midnight meeting. He'd never been out at midnight before. There was going to be a full moon tonight, though, so he'd have no trouble finding his way. Eli smiled happily. Cowboys in the afternoon, that was all right—but spacemen at night, now that was really something!

He went to his closet and got out his Captain Space helmet and polished the plastic sphere with the edge of his bedspread. He found his raygun on the shelf near the window and stroked the bronze hand-grip. When you pulled the trigger it went *brrrr-aaaa-tttt*, and sparks flew. Boy, it was almost real. Almost, he thought. Only to

yourself did you say almost. The guys never said almost to each other, so you shouldn't ought to say almost to your folks, either. When you were playing, it was real all right. It was as real as real could be, as real as you used to think dreams were, until a year or so ago when you really started to grow up. But at home and alone you could say almost because you knew, truly, that you were only making believe.

Thinking happily of what the night would bring, Eli drifted off to sleep.

He awoke with a start and immediately looked at his Buck Rogers wristwatch. He whistled softly. It was ten to twelve. The house was absolutely silent, and dark. There was white light streaming in through the window, though. Bright moonlight. Eli could see the time on his wristwatch by the light of the moon, it was that bright. He stood up quietly and took off his cowboy boots, replacing them with the spaceboots which had been his eighth birthday present. There was a smiling picture of Captain Space, the Man of the Future, on each boot. Then Eli removed his gunbelt and substituted the raygun. Last of



all, he put the space helmet over his head. Then he went to the window. It was a warm night, and very still. Eli unhooked the screen and climbed out into the white moonlight. He found the porchroof with his spaceboot-shod feet, and crawled quickly across it, then let himself down to the ground on the rose trellis.

White moonlight, a warm breeze, and silent, deserted streets. Eli walked quickly toward the corner, and turned up Spring Street. This was really living. . . .

It was a very typical planet circling a very typical star, Bjaz thought as he brought the spacescout down, but it was within the necessary distance range of its primary and had the proper albedo to indicate a strong possibility of life. Since life meant conquest—provided the prize was worth the job and the dominant animal strain on the planet, if any, would not offer resistance out of proportion to the only modest storehouse of mineral resources that the planet would be—Bjaz swooped down from the mother ship in his spaceship, prepared to find out.

The key to conquest, of course, was attitude. If the

natives of this planet were prepared to resist with all their might and if their civilization had advanced as far as gunpowder or atomics, then it wouldn't be worth the casualties and logistics problems of conquest. If, on the other hand, the natives were docile, unimaginative, bovine-like creatures . . . Bjaz stroked his antennae together in anticipation. He thought: Twenty-eight. That was a good round number. This was his twenty-eighth and last world. He would retire and live well on one of the conquered worlds the rest of his life. Of course, if this particular world proved too tough a nut to crack, Bjaz would go on, seeking elsewhere. It was all up to the inhabitants, and how much they were willing to fight for their freedom. Then, too, this was a backwater of the galaxy. No scoutship had ever been here, and perhaps there already was a complex of local spatial cultures fighting for power. Bjaz would avoid their fight like the plague. . . .

"Hey, Eli! Over here!"

It was the vacant lot back of the Sutter house on Spring Street. The space helmets bobbed in the tall grass and weeds, their plastic surfaces

agleam in the moonlight. Eli took out his raygun and fired it. "Brrrr-aaaa-tttt!"

Tommy Webb knocked the gun aside. "We ain't chosen sides, stupid," he pointed out. Eli flushed. Tommy Webb was nine and a half, almost ten. Tommy was an expert on space stuff, having visited the planetarium in New York City once. Besides, by virtue of being biggest, oldest, and most of all strongest, Tommy was the leader of the gang.

A cricket chirped in the weed-grown lot, and another answered it. The whole idea of being out at night like this with the night sounds and the night smells fascinated Eli. He wished this night would go on forever and ever.

"Mack and me'll choose sides," Tommy Webb told the ten assembled boys. "Here's the setup. There's a rocketship with a valuable cargo of space-ore coming in from the asteroids, see, and we'll be waiting for it near the orbit of the moon. They won't have a chance."

"What kind of ore?" Eli asked.

"Just space-ore, stupid," Tommy Webb said.

"Who's stupid?" Eli said.

"You're stupid if you keep asking questions," Tommy Webb said.

"I'm stupid, huh?" Eli said. "Brrrr-aaa-ttt!" went his raygun. Sparks flew in the night. "I shot you, you're dead!"

Tommy Webb hit him in the shoulder, a look of disgust on his face. Eli stopped firing the raygun. He never could get along with Tommy Webb. Tommy was a bully. Besides, it was mutual. Eli's was the snazziest raygun in the whole gang, and he fired it every chance he got because he knew it made Tommy Webb, whose raygun was only a piece of wood shaped like a raygun, jealous.

They chose sides. Eli and Tommy Webb were on opposite sides, as they always were. "Now, you guys must be the spaceship coming in with space-ore from the asteroids," Tommy Webb began, "and we'll be the space pirates."

"Oh, no you won't!" Eli cried. "This time we're gonna be the pirates. Right, guys?"

There was general agreement on Eli's side. Tommy Webb shook his head stubbornly. Mack, who was almost as old as Tommy, and who was glad to have Eli with his special raygun on his side, poked Tommy one in the chest. "Brrrr-aaa-tttt!" went Eli's raygun.

A window in the apartment house across the street was flung open and a man's angry voice shouted. "Hey, you kids, gowan get lost before I calla cops!"

"Look what you done now, stupid!" Tommy Webb hissed at Eli, who had hastily stopped firing his raygun. "Now we'll have to find someplace else."

"All right," said Eli. "But we're gonna be the pirates, see? Or else I'll fire my raygun again and—"

"O.K., O.K.," groaned Tommy Webb, "only keep that thing quiet until we're ready to play."

"You swear we can be the pirates this time?"

"I'm not gonna swear nothing!" Tommy Webb said, suddenly sullen.

"Brrr-aaa-tttt!" went Eli's raygun.

Tommy hit him and tried to take the raygun away. Eli ran across the lot, laughing. The man in the apartment house yelled again.

"... warned you kids ... gonna calla cops is what ..."

Just then a big bulky shape came floating down soft as a feather in the moonlight. It was bulky like a fat teardrop is bulky. It landed on its side in the lot with hardly a sound.

"Will ya lookit that!" said Tommy Webb.

"A spaceship!" somebody yelled.

Eli grinned in anticipation. Sometimes they had their little arguments, but once the game got underway, the arguments were quickly forgotten. Man, but the spaceship seemed real! Even realer than the imaginary stagecoach had been this afternoon! Of course, it *was* make-believe. It had to be make-believe. Sometimes you could get all wrapped up in your games, that was all. But it sure looked just like a spaceship ought to look. All you had to do was believe things were real and just what you said while you were playing. That way you sure had the most fun. Suspension of disbelief, an adult would have called it, but the term would have meant nothing to Eli. And in this case, no suspension of disbelief was necessary, although Eli couldn't know that. The spaceship was quite—dangerously—real. ...

"Come on, gang!" Eli cried, rushing toward the spaceship before Tommy Webb could react to its sudden appearance. "We must be the pirates and it's landing on Luna—" he was very proud of using the word Luna

so naturally, just like he might have said Spring Street—"to refuel. Let's get it, boys!"

And they all rushed toward the spaceship just as a door came into being in its side and slid open.

Bjaz came forth.

There was bright moonlight, lush vegetation, and a band of howling natives, rushing at him. Bjaz smiled expectantly, waiting. He was wearing a forcefield and consequently was in absolutely no danger. He could have pressed a button on the sleeve of his forelimb tunic and killed the attacking figures instantly with a meson-grid beam. But it wasn't necessary. He was only a scout, here to see . . .

His appearance brought the mob of natives up short. They milled about uncertainly while, impassive, curious, he watched them, waiting, studying . . .

"Holy Mackerel!" Mac cried. "Lookit that, willya?"

They all seemed uncertain, and a little scared. It sure was the funniest looking and biggest bug Eli had ever seen. It was a bug every bit as big as Tommy Webb, and it wore clothes. Came right out of the spaceship, too.

Yeah, sure, Eli told himself. He'd heard his mother and father talking after he'd gone to his room when he missed supper. Maybe his imagination really was working overtime. Maybe he'd have to watch it. Whoever heard of bugs in spaceships?

He didn't know the word, but he thought he could exorcise the peculiar-looking monster with boldness. "Let's get him, gang!" he cried, and charged across the lot.

He drew his raygun, firing from the hip. "Brrr-aaa-tttt!"

They were bold, all right, Bjaz thought in disappointment. Bold—or foolhardy. It didn't matter. Either way the resistance would be stiff, bloody, costly. The lead creature drew a weapon now and fired it, heedless of the muzzles of Bjaz's own blast-beams protruding from the side of the ship. One touch of Bjaz's fingers could have sent this whole mob of natives, and half their city, a mile into the air. . . .

The weapon made a loud, grating noise. Sparks flew from its muzzle as Bjaz's forcefield completely absorbed and rendered harmless whatever ray it sent forth. Bjaz guessed it to be primi-

tive atomics. It certainly was a crude weapon, though. Much of the energy was wasted at the muzzle in the form of simple sparks. . . .

"You're dead!" screamed the attacking figure. "Dead, dead, dead!" He came on implacably as Bjaz' telethinker translated the words. Telepathic suggestion? Bjaz wondered. He did not know, he had no way of telling. He was quite immune to telepathic suggestion, although the common warriors of his world, unlike the scouts, were not. He shook his head sadly.

Bravery, he thought.

Atomic weapons.

Telepathic weapons.

We could take them, of course. But they'd be tough.

Not worth it. . . .

He withdrew slowly, sadly, toward the spaceship as a new sound, a whining whistle, came out of the distance.

"Cops!" hollered Tommy Webb. "You and that raygun, Eli!"

The siren wailed closer, a car door slammed, feet pounded across the lot.

"Hey, you in there!" a man's voice shouted.

The spaceship door slid shut. The big bug had gone back inside. The spaceship purred, almost like an ani-

mal, and rose slowly from the ground.

"What the hell is that?" shouted the man's voice. It was a policeman. Two of them came running.

"Aw, just a spaceship," said Eli.

"Kids, they're just kids," the second cop said.

"That wasn't no kids flying that thing," the first cop said. They looked up at the sky.

Against the orrightness of the moon, a teardrop-shape hung, then faded swiftly into the night.

"Whatever it was, it was real," the first policeman said.

"Sure, it was real," Eli told him. "That's what I keep trying to tell Ma."

"You boys better go home now," the second policeman said. "Next time we'll have to take your names and bring you all down the stationhouse for your folks to come and pick up."

"I seen it," the first policeman said.

"Maybe," said the second. "I'm not sure I saw anything. Anyhow, where'd it go?"

His companion pointed straight up. "Think we ought to notify the air force?"

"Oh, yeah, sure! That's all we'd need. Give 'em an unidentified object report like

this and you'll never make sergeant, O'Shaughnessey."

"Yeah, but—"

Eli trudged home slowly with the other guys. It had been some game. But the closer Eli got to home, the less sure he was that it hadn't really happened. Well, he wouldn't tell the folks, anyhow. They'd razz him sure, if not worse. Besides, whatever that big bug was, the gang had sure scared heck out of it. Eli slipped through his window after mounting the trellis and the porch roof. Soon he was sound asleep.

Back at the vacant lot, O'Shaughnessey couldn't make up his mind. He'd seen the thing, all right. But—report it—? U.F.O. — Unidentified Flying Object. The police funnelled a dozen calls like that a week to the local Air Force base. The Air Force was very patient and the po-

lice, very cynical. O'Shaughnessey couldn't send in such a report—with himself as viewer. He just couldn't . . .

But when he looked at the very center of the vacant lot, the ground seemed to be glowing.

With radioactivity. . . .

From a spaceship?

Well, whatever it was, it was gone. Somehow, the kids had chased it. Anyhow, they hadn't seemed scared, had they?

O'Shaughnessey joined his partner in the prowler car and did the only thing he could do under the circumstances. He waited until he was off duty and then belted the bottle he kept for just such emergencies long and hard. By the time he was finished he had convinced himself that it had been some kind of optical illusion.

Anyhow, it didn't matter now—thanks to Eli.

#### THE END

---

## DREAM WORLD

Something Brand New in Fiction.

On Sale December 11th



### BY THE READERS

Dear Ed:

Your idea on running serials in two installments sounds good to me. I just don't like to have to wait four or five months to finish a story regardless of how good it is.

I thought "A World Called Crimson" was fair. "But Who Wilts the Lettuce?" was the best story in the book. Very refreshing. Hope for more like it.

James Collins  
270 W. Harding  
San Antonio, Texas

• *We have two crackerjack two-parters in the house now—to be scheduled soon. If our readers so decree, the short serial will become a regular feature.*—ED.

Dear Editor:

You're right about the August *Amazing* being better than July, but the September issue—tops!

To Mr. Merle Lamson: Just what was wrong with the Shaver Mystery. Although I am not a "believer" I found it very interesting.

"The Space Club" is an excellent idea, I appreciate any letters from any fans whatsoever.

Philip Chase  
14 Kennebec St.  
Bar Harbor, Maine

• *The Space Club gets off to a rousing start in this issue. See page 88.—ED.*

Dear Editor:

On the whole *Amazing Stories* is better than average, but that really isn't very much of a compliment. It could be better if you'd print longer novels, serials especially with scientific scope.

I didn't like what Mr. Merle Lamson said about teenagers. I agreed with him on other topics he mentioned.

Lenny Brown  
4701 Snyder Ave.  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

• *There has been quite a bit of comment on Merle Lamson's letter in the September issue of Amazing. His comment was, "I appreciate s-f as a form of literature but my appreciation stops when it is foisted on many immature minds as fact. I refer to young teenagers, recognizing that they have not had too many experiences to be very good judges and accepting all too readily the printed word as true fact." We feel that perhaps Mr. Lamson underestimates the young mind. We have found from experience that those who believe fiercely in flying saucers—those who felt the Shaver Mystery to be factual, were adults—not juveniles. We have yet to meet a juvenile fanatic. By that we mean an immature mind that is channeled so firmly in one direction that it might not go in another direction next week.—ED.*

Dear Ed:

Great, wonderful, good, spectacular—my opinion of *Amazing Stories*. It gets better every month. My favorite section is "... Or So You Say." I like to hear what the other fans think about the mag.

Maureen Sullivan  
1501 Marcus Ave.  
St. Louis 13, Mo.

• *That's the general idea behind the Space Club—so you can hear directly from other fans what they think about Amazing—and a lot of other things.—ED.*



Dear Ed:

Roscoe, one of my robots, and I agree that the September cover of *Amazing Stories* is not only one of the best this year, but one of the most exciting.

Hi, Miss Mary Miller. Ed., save that letter. Let's give a big cheer—women are still reading s-f!

Roger A. Weir

• *And a big cheer for Roscoe, too.*—ED.

Dear Editor:

Since April I have been enjoying *Amazing Stories* every month. I liked the stories in the September issue very much, especially "A World Called Crimson" and "The Man Who Hated Mars." The illustration for the former was great too.

Ted R. Oliver

16119 Fellowship Avenue

Puente, California

Dear Ed:

Enjoyed the September issue of *Amazing* as usual. Glad to see the announcement of "The Space Club." I think we space bugs should know where the others are.

Editorial on atomic waste was food for thought. All too often we have the attitude of "Let George do it."

W. C. Brandt

Apt. N

1725 Seminary Ave.

Oakland 21, Calif.

• *You're right about that last and this time George won't be available. We have it on good authority that he left for the South Pole last week.*—ED.

Dear Editor:

When I read the editorial in the December '55 issue, I was overjoyed to see that fast-paced adventure stories were to have a rebirth in *Amazing Stories*. Since the change of editors will this policy remain in effect?

As for serials, I am all for them! When *Amazing* was bi-monthly we were told that serials would not be run because

of this. But *Amazing* is monthly now and I am anxiously awaiting some more serials, at least two serialized novels a year.

Deen Warren  
54 Park Way  
San Anselmo, Calif.

• *The policy set by Howard Browne will remain in effect. We'd be afraid to change it. If we did we'd probably get an indignant letter from "Hod," and that we don't want.*—ED.

Dear Editor:

My idea of a really good s-f magazine is expressed in *Amazing Stories*. If it were in pulp size and did not include "The Revolving Fan" and "The Spectroscope" it would be perfect. As usual enjoyed the September issue.

Willford Lee  
716 Linden St.  
Boise, Idaho

• *But a lot of other folks like those features, Lee, and knowing you for what you are, a generous, fair-minded, all-around good fellow, we're sure you'll go right on reading Amazing, happy in the knowledge that others are happy too.*—ED.

Dear Editor:

I was entertained by most of the stories in the September *Amazing Stories*. Unfortunately the one that did not appeal to me was the lead "A World Called Crimson." It seemed to be more of a dream world type story.

The cartoons were better than usual and I hope you continue to use them. Also looking forward to that serial you mentioned.

Herbert E. Beach  
210 West Paquin  
Waterville, Minn.

• *Cartoons are like salt and pepper in the stew. Most people like them.*—ED.

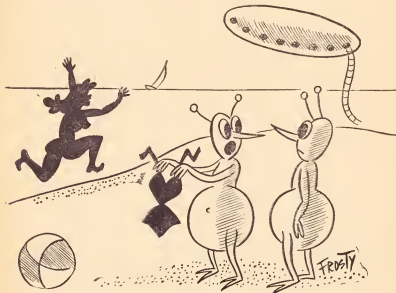
Dear Editor:

In the August issue Mr. Hayes suggested that you select letters of sufficient quality and print three, four or five pages. Space, man! If you cut the letter column down any more I'd have to stop buying *Amazing*—a horrible thought. It is through these letters that fans from all over communicate with each other. You wouldn't want to abandon the very foundations of fandom!

Allen Mardis, Jr.  
Bement, Illinois

• *As we said before—but we'll say it again—The Space Club should answer this problem and keep everybody satisfied. Also, it should increase fandom by giving fans more people to contact. Tell the folks you write to about fanzines and conventions and such. They'll want to know more.—ED.*

---



"I don't know what kind of a creature it is,  
but I've got some of its skin."

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

# Take Any 3 OF THESE SCIENCE FICTION THRILLERS

Yours for Only \$1.00 WITH MEMBERSHIP

## Choose From These SIX Outstanding Best-Sellers:



**REPORT ON UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS—** For description, please see other side. (Pub. ed. \$4.50)

**THE ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION ANTHOLOGY.** A story about the

first A-Bomb... written before it was invented! A story of the movie machine that shows "newsreels" of any past event. Plus a score of other best tales from a dozen years of Astounding Science-Fiction magazine by its editor, John W. Campbell, Jr. (Pub. ed. \$3.50)

**OMNIBUS OF SCIENCE-FICTION.** 43 top-stories by outstanding authors... stories of Wonders of Earth and Man... of startling inventions... of visitors from Outer Space... of Far Traveling... Adventures in Dimension... Wonders of Tomorrow. 562 pages. (Pub. ed. \$3.50)



**THE TREASURY OF SCIENCE-FICTION CLASSICS.** World-renowned stories that have stood the test of time—by H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Aldous Huxley, Philip Wylie, Edgar Allan Poe, E. M. Forster, F. Scott Fitzgerald, etc. 704 pages. (Pub. ed. \$2.95)

**WORLD OUT OF MIND, by J. T. McIntosh.** Creatures from Outer Space (disguised as humans) come to Earth to prepare for invasion. And one of these super-saboteurs wins the world's highest office and is finally chosen to lead the Earth's defense! (Pub. ed. \$3.00)



**SECOND FOUNDATION, by Isaac Asimov.** The terrible psychopathic genius called "The Mule" had conquered almost the entire Galaxy. Only one civilization had escaped his evil clutches. How could they stop this madman? (Pub. ed. \$2.75)

### SEND NO MONEY

#### Just Mail Coupon

WE KNOW you will enjoy membership in this new book club. To PROVE it we are making this amazing offer. Your choice of ANY 3 of these new Science-Fiction best sellers—at ONLY \$1 FOR ALL 3! Two are your gift books for joining. The other is your first selection. As a member you will be offered the "cream" of the new \$2.75 to \$4.00 Science-Fiction Books—for only \$1. You take only those books you really want—as few as four a year. But this offer may have to be withdrawn. So mail the coupon RIGHT NOW to:

SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB  
Dept. AM-11, Garden City, N. Y.

### Which 3 Do You Want for Only \$1.00

#### SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB

Dept. AM-11, Garden City, N. Y.

Please rush the 3 books checked below, as my gift books and first selection. Bill me only \$1 for all 3 (plus few cents shipping charges), and enroll me as a member. Every month send the Club's free bulletin, "Things to Come," so that I may decide whether I wish to receive the coming selection. For each book I accept, I will pay only \$1 plus shipping. I need not take a book every month (only 4 during each year I am a member) — and may resign any time after accepting 4 selections.

**SPECIAL NO-RISK GUARANTEE:** If not delighted, I may return all books in 7 days, pay nothing and this membership will be cancelled.

- ☐ Astounding S-F Anthology  
☐ Omnibus of S-F  
☐ Report on UFOs

- ☐ Second Foundation  
☐ Treasury of S-F Classics  
☐ World Out of Mind

Name..... (Please Print)

Address.....

City..... Zone..... State.....

Selection price in Canada \$1.10 plus shipping. Address Science-Fiction Club, 105 Bond St., Toronto 2. (Offer good only in U. S. and Canada.)

# At Last! Former Air Force Expert Reveals HUSHED-UP FACTS ON "FLYING SAUCERS"

Here is the first authoritative  
report on Unidentified Flying Objects  
—by the top man in charge of  
their official investigation!

**ARE "Flying Saucers"**  
really Are they interplanetary  
spaceships manned by  
intelligent beings? THE RE-  
PORT ON UNIDENTIFIED  
FLYING OBJECTS discloses  
ALL the startling, hereto-  
fore "hushed-up" FACTS—  
and you can draw your own  
conclusions!

As chief of the Air Force  
project assigned to the in-  
vestigation and analysis of  
"UFO's," Edward J. Rup-  
pelt and his staff studied  
over 4,500 reports—and dis-  
cussed them with everyone  
from out-and-out crackpots

to top-level scientists and  
generals.

All reports were subjected  
to military intelligence anal-  
ysis. Astronomers, physi-  
cists, aerodynamic engineers,  
and psychologists were con-  
sulted in the course of ex-  
haustive investigation. The  
official Air Technical Intelli-  
gence Center reports of their  
findings, many details of which  
are revealed for the first time  
in this book, contain some  
completely baffling accounts  
by thoroughly reliable wit-  
nesses—some of whom were  
expert scientists and military  
men!

THE REPORT ON  
UNIDENTIFIED  
FLYING OBJECTS  
Edward J. Ruppelt

**NOT fiction**  
but thought-  
provoking  
FACT by the  
former head  
of the U. S.  
Air Force  
PROJECT  
BLUE BOOK  
investigating  
"Flying  
Saucers."

**THE BOOK CLUB OF TOMORROW  
IS HERE TODAY!**

As a member of the Sci-  
ence-Fiction Book Club, you  
can now enjoy the best new  
Science-Fiction novels for  
only \$1 each (plus few cents  
shipping)—even though  
they cost \$2.50 and up  
in publishers' editions.  
You need take only four  
books a year—yet you  
can still enjoy this sen-  
sational low price!

And on this special  
introductory offer you  
are invited to select any  
3 of the books shown  
here (and described on  
the other side) for  
**ONLY ONE DOLLAR.**  
Each is a brand-new,  
full-length, full-sized  
thriller. An \$8.70 to  
\$11.50 value—yours for  
only \$1. Read all about  
them—then mail the  
coupon (on other side)  
**RIGHT NOW!**

**Any 3**  
OF THESE  
COMPLETE NEW  
MASTERPIECES OF  
**SCIENCE-FICTION**

*Yours for Only* **\$1.00**  
WITH  
MEMBERSHIP

THE HASTING  
SCIENCE FICTION  
ANTHOLOGY

OMNIBUS OF  
SCIENCE  
FICTION

THE TREASURY OF  
SCIENCE FICTION

SECOND  
FOUNDATION

**See other side for Details**